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**NOISES  
OFF**  
MICHAEL FRAYN

B L O O M S B U R Y

# Noises Off

*a play in three acts by*

**Michael Frayn**

Bloomsbury Methuen Drama

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

B L O O M S B U R Y

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## Noises Off: a brief history

The play has gone through many different forms and versions. It began life as a short one-acter entitled *Exits*, commissioned for a midnight matinee of the Combined Theatrical Charities at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, on 10 September 1977, where it was directed by Eric Thompson, and played by Denis Quilley, Patricia Routledge, Edward Fox, Dinsdale Landen, and Polly Adams. Michael Codron thereupon commissioned a full-length version, and waited for it with intermittent patience. Michael Blakemore, who was to direct it, persuaded me to rethink and restructure the resulting text, and suggested a great many ideas which I incorporated.

After the play had opened at the Lyric, Hammersmith, in 1982, I did a great deal more rewriting, and went on rewriting until Nicky Henson, who was playing Garry, announced on behalf of the cast (rather as Garry himself might have done) that they would learn no further versions.

The play transferred to the Savoy Theatre, and ran until 1987, with five successive casts. For two of the cast-changes I did more rewrites. I also rewrote for the production in Washington in 1983, and I rewrote again when this moved to Broadway. When the play was revived at the National Theatre in 2000 I rewrote yet again. Some of the changes were ones that I'd been longing to make myself – there's nothing like having to sit through a play over and over again to make your finger itch for the delete key – while many more changes were suggested by my new director, Jeremy Sams.

What vicissitudes it has been through in other languages I can mostly only guess. In France it has been played under two different titles (sometimes simultaneously in different parts of the country), and in Germany under four. I imagine that it's often been freely adapted to local circumstances, in spite of the prohibitions in the contract. In France, certainly, my British actors and the characters they are playing turned into Frenchmen, in Italy into Italians (who introduced a 'Sardine Song' between the acts). In Barcelona they were Catalan-speaking actors playing Spanish-speaking characters; in Tampere, in northern Finland, they were robust northerners speaking the Tampere dialect and playing effete southerners with Helsinki accents. On the Japanese poster they all appear to be Japanese; on the Chinese poster Chinese. In Prague they performed the play for some ten years without Act Three, and no one noticed until I arrived.

Farce seems to gather farce around it. One Christmas in Sicily two different touring productions, one lawfully contracted, one not, like husband and lover in a farce, turned up in Catania at the same time, to their mutual surprise; lawsuits followed. In 2000, re-reading the English text that had been in use for the previous fifteen years, I discovered a number of bizarre misprints, and I suspect that directors around the world had been driven to some quite outlandish devices to make sense of them. Now the present director, Lindsay Posner, with even more scrupulous scholarship, has discovered a few more, and I don't like to think how many Tramplemains around the world in the last eleven years have been exiting into the bedroom and emerging dutifully but inexplicably two lines later from the linen cupboard.

Michael Frayn  
November 2011

*Noises Off* was first presented, by arrangement with Michael Codron, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, on 23 February 1982, and on 31 March by Michael Codron at the Savoy Theatre, London, with the following cast:

<b>Dotty Otley</b>	Patricia Routledge
<b>Lloyd Dallas</b>	Paul Eddington
<b>Garry Lejeune</b>	Nicky Henson
<b>Brooke Ashton</b>	Rowena Roberts
<b>Poppy Norton-Taylor</b>	Yvonne Antrobus
<b>Frederick Fellowes</b>	Tony Matthews
<b>Belinda Blair</b>	Jan Waters
<b>Tim Allgood</b>	Roger Lloyd Pack
<b>Selsdon Mowbray</b>	Michael Aldridge
<b>Electrician</b>	Ray Edwards

*Director* Michael Blakemore

*Designer* Michael Annals

*Lighting* Spike Gaden

It was revived in its present form by the Royal National Theatre, in association with the Ambassador Theatre Group and Act Productions Ltd. It previewed in the Lyttelton Theatre on 29 September 2000, and opened on 5 October, with the following cast:

<b>Dotty Otley</b>	Patricia Hodge
<b>Lloyd Dallas</b>	Peter Egan
<b>Garry Lejeune</b>	Aden Gillett
<b>Brooke Ashton</b>	Natalie Walter
<b>Poppy Norton-Taylor</b>	Selina Griffiths
<b>Frederick Fellowes</b>	Jeff Rawle
<b>Belinda Blair</b>	Susie Blake
<b>Tim Allgood</b>	Paul Thornley
<b>Selsdon Mowbray</b>	Christopher Benjamin

*Director* Jeremy Sams

*Designer* Robert Jones

*Lighting* Tim Mitchell

*Sound* Fergus O'Hare for Aura

On 14 May 2001 this production opened at the Piccadilly Theatre, London, with the same cast except for:

<b>Dotty Otley</b>	Lynn Redgrave
<b>Garry Lejeune</b>	Stephen Mangan

*Noises Off* was most recently revived in a production at The Old Vic, London, which premiered on 3 December 2011 and featured the following

cast and creative team:

**Dotty Otley**  
**Lloyd Dallas**  
**Garry Lejeune**  
**Brooke Ashton**  
**Poppy Norton-Taylor**  
**Frederick Fellowes**  
**Belinda Blair**  
**Tim Allgood**  
**Selsdon Mowbray**

Celia Imrie  
Robert Glenister  
Jamie Glover  
Amy Nuttall  
Aisling Loftus  
Jonathan Coy  
Janie Dee  
Paul Ready  
Karl Johnson

*Director* Lindsay Posner  
*Designer* Peter McKintosh  
*Lighting* Paul Pyant  
*Music* Michael Bruce  
*Sound* Fergus O'Hare  
*Movement and Fights* Kate Waters  
*Casting* Maggie Lunn

The cast of *Noises Off* are performing another play, *Nothing On*. The casting in *Nothing On* is as follows:

<b>Mrs Clackett</b>	Dotty Otley
<b>Roger Tramplemain</b>	Garry Lejeune
<b>Vicki</b>	Brooke Ashton
<b>Philip Brent</b>	Frederick Fellowes
<b>Flavia Brent</b>	Belinda Blair
<b>Burglar</b>	Selsdon Mowbray
<b>Sheikh</b>	Frederick Fellowes

*Director* Lloyd Dallas

*Company and Stage Manager* Tim Allgood

*Assistant Stage Manager* Poppy Norton-Taylor

The action takes place in the living-room of the Brents' country home, on a Wednesday afternoon.

**Act One:** *The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.*

(Grand Theatre, Weston-super-Mare. Monday 14 January)

**Act One:** *The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.*

(Theatre Royal, Ashton-under-Lyne. Wednesday matinee, 13 February)

**Act One:** *The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.*

(Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees. Saturday 6 April)

There is an interval between Act One and Act One. There is no interval between Act One and Act One.

## Act One

*The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.*

(Grand Theatre, Weston-super-Mare. Monday 14 January.)

*From the estate agent's description of the property:*

*A delightful 16th-century posset mill, 25 miles from London. Lovingly converted, old-world atmosphere, many period features. Fully equipped with every aid to modern living and beautifully furnished throughout by owner now resident abroad. Ideal for overseas company seeking perfect English setting to house senior executive. Minimum three months' let. Apply sole agents: Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.*

*The accommodation comprises: an open-plan living area, with a staircase leading to a gallery. A notable feature is the extensive range of entrances and exits provided. On the ground floor the front door gives access to the mature garden and delightful village beyond. Another door leads to the elegant panelled study, and a third to the light and airy modern service quarters. A fourth door opens into a luxurious bathroom/ WC suite, and a full-length south-facing window affords extensive views. On the gallery level is the door to the master bedroom, and another to a small but well-proportioned linen cupboard. A corridor gives access to all the other rooms in the upper parts of the house. Another beautifully equipped bathroom/ WC suite opens off the landing halfway up the stairs.*

*All in all, a superb example of the traditional English set-builder's craft – a place where the discerning theatregoer will feel instantly at home.*

*Introductory music. As the curtain rises, the award-winning modern telephone is ringing.*

*Enter from the service quarters **Mrs Clackett**, a housekeeper of character. She is carrying an imposing plate of sardines.*

**Mrs Clackett** It's no good you going on. I can't open sardines *and* answer the phone. I've only got one pair of feet.

*She puts the sardines down on the telephone table by the sofa, and picks up the phone.*

Hello . . . Yes, but there's no one here, love . . . No, Mr Brent's not here . . . He lives here, yes, but he don't live here now because he lives in Spain . . . Mr Philip Brent, that's right . . . The one who writes the plays, that's him, only now he writes them in Spain . . . No, she's in Spain, too, they're all in Spain, there's no one here . . . Am *I* in Spain? No, I'm not in Spain, dear. I look after the house for them, but I go home at one o'clock on Wednesday, only I've got a nice plate of sardines to put my feet up with, because it's the royal what's it called on the telly – the royal you know – where's the paper, then . . . ?

*She picks up the newspaper lying on the sofa and searches in it.*

. . . And if it's to do with letting the house then you'll have to ring the house agents, because they're the agents for the house . . . Squire, Squire, Hackham and who's the other one . . . ? No, they're not in Spain, they're next to the phone in the study. Squire, Squire, Hackham, and hold on, I'll go and look.

*She replaces the receiver.*

*Or so the stage-directions say in Robin Housemonger's play, Nothing On. In fact, though, she puts the receiver down beside the phone instead.*

Always the same, isn't it. Soon as you take the weight off your feet, down it all comes on your head.

*Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, still holding the newspaper.*

*Or so the stage direction says. In fact, she moves off holding the plate of sardines instead of the newspaper. As she does so, Dotty Otley, the actress who is playing the part of Mrs Clackett, comes out of character to comment on the move.*

**Dotty** And I take the sardines. No, I leave the sardines. No, I take the sardines.

*The disembodied voice of Lloyd Dallas, the director of Nothing On,*

*replies from somewhere out in the darkness of the auditorium.*

**Lloyd** You leave the sardines and you put the receiver back.

**Dotty** Oh yes, I put the receiver back.

*She puts the receiver back and moves off again with the sardines.*

**Lloyd** And you leave the sardines.

**Dotty** And I *leave* the sardines?

**Lloyd** You *leave* the sardines.

**Dotty** I put the receiver back and I leave the sardines.

**Lloyd** Right.

**Dotty** We've changed that, have we, love?

**Lloyd** No, love.

**Dotty** That's what I've always been doing?

**Lloyd** I shouldn't say that, Dotty, my precious.

**Dotty** How about the words, love? Am I getting some of them right?

**Lloyd** Some of them have a very familiar ring.

**Dotty** Only it's like a fruit machine in there.

**Lloyd** I know that, Dotty.

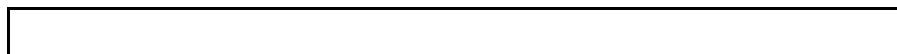
**Dotty** I open my mouth, and I never know if it's going to come out three oranges or two lemons and a banana.

**Lloyd** Anyway, it's not midnight yet. We don't open till tomorrow. So you're holding the receiver.

**Dotty** I'm holding the receiver.

**Lloyd** 'Squire, Squire, Hackham and, hold on . . .'

**Dotty** *resumes her performance as Mrs Clackett.*



**Mrs Clackett** Squire, Squire, Hackham and, hold on, don't go away, I'm putting it down.

*She replaces the receiver.*

Always the same, isn't it. Put your feet up for two minutes and immediately they come running after you.

*Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, still holding the newspaper.*

*Only she isn't holding the newspaper.*

*The sound of a key in the lock.*

**Lloyd** Hold it.

*The front door opens. On the doorstep stands **Roger**, holding a cardboard box. He is about thirty and has the well-appointed air of a man who handles high-class real estate.*

**Roger** . . . I have a housekeeper, yes, but this is her afternoon off.

**Lloyd** Hold it, Garry. Dotty!

*Enter **Vicki** through the front door. She is a desirable property in her early twenties, well-built and beautifully maintained throughout.*

**Roger** So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

**Lloyd** Hold it, Brooke. Dotty!

*Enter **Dotty** from the study.*

**Dotty** Come back?

**Lloyd** Yes, and go out again with the *newspaper*.

**Dotty** The newspaper? Oh, the newspaper.

**Lloyd** You put the receiver back, you leave the sardines and you go out with the newspaper.

**Garry** Here you are, love.

**Dotty** Sorry, love.

**Garry** (*embraces her*) Don't worry, love. It's only the technical.

**Lloyd** It's the dress, Garry, honey. It's the dress rehearsal.

**Garry** So when was the technical?

**Lloyd** So when's the dress? We open tomorrow!

**Garry** Well, we're all thinking of it as the technical. (*To Dotty.*) Aren't we, love?

**Dotty** It's all those words, my sweetheart.

**Garry** Don't worry about the words, Dotty, my pet.

**Dotty** Coming up like oranges and lemons.

**Garry** Listen, Dotty, your words are fine, your words are better than the, do you know what I mean? (*To Brooke.*) Isn't that right?

**Brooke** (*her thoughts elsewhere*) Sorry?

**Garry** (*to Dotty*) I mean, OK, so he's the, you know. Fine. But, Dotty, love, you've been playing this kind of part for, well, you know what I mean.

**Lloyd** All right? So Garry and Brooke are off, Dotty's holding the receiver . . .

**Garry** No, but here we are, we're all thinking, my God, we open tomorrow, we've only had a fortnight to rehearse, we don't know where we are, but my God, here we are!

**Dotty** That's right, my sweet. Isn't that right, Lloyd?

**Lloyd** Beautifully put, Garry.

**Garry** No, but we've got to play Weston-super-Mare all the rest of this week, then Yeovil, then God knows where, then God knows where else, and so on for God knows how long, and we're all of us feeling pretty much, you know . . . (*To Brooke.*) I mean, aren't *you*?

**Brooke** Sorry?

**Lloyd** Anyway, you're off, Dotty's holding the receiver . . .

**Garry** Sorry, Lloyd. But sometimes you just have to come right out with it. You know?

**Lloyd** I know.

**Garry** Thanks, Lloyd.

**Lloyd** OK, Garry. So you're off . . .

**Garry** Lloyd, let me just say one thing. Since we've stopped. I've worked with a lot of directors, Lloyd. Some of them were geniuses. Some of them were bastards. But I've never met one who was so totally and absolutely . . . I don't know . . .

**Lloyd** Thank you, Garry. I'm very touched. Now will you get off the fucking stage?

*Exit Garry through the front door.*

**Lloyd** And, Brooke . . .

**Brooke** Yes?

**Lloyd** Are you in?

**Brooke** In?

**Lloyd** Are you there?

**Brooke** What?

**Lloyd** You're out. OK. I'll call again. And on we go.

*Exit Brooke through the front door.*

**Lloyd** So there you are, holding the receiver.

**Dotty** So there I am, holding the receiver. I put the receiver back and I leave the sardines.

<p><b>Mrs Clackett</b> Always the same story, isn't it . . .</p>
--

**Lloyd** And you take the newspaper.

*She comes back, and picks up the newspaper and the receiver.*

**Dotty** I leave the sardines, I take the newspaper.

**Mrs Clackett** Always the same story, isn't it. It's a weight off your mind, it's a load off your stomach.

**Dotty** And off at last I go.

**Lloyd** Leaving the receiver.

*She replaces the receiver and goes off into the study. Enter **Roger** as before, with the cardboard box.*

**Roger** . . . I have a housekeeper, yes, but this is her afternoon off.

*Enter **Vicki** as before.*

**Roger** So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

**Roger** *goes back and brings in a flight bag, and closes the front door.*

I'll just check.

*He opens the door to the service quarters. **Vicki** gazes round.*

**Roger** Hello? Anyone at home?

*Closes the door.*

No, there's no one here. So what do you think?

**Vicki** Great. And this is all yours?

**Roger** Just a little shack in the woods, really. Converted posset mill. Sixteenth-century.

**Vicki** It must have cost a bomb.

**Roger** Well, one has to have somewhere to entertain one's business associates. Someone coming at four o'clock, in fact. Arab sheikh. Oil. You know.

**Vicki** Right. And I've got to get those files to our Basingstoke office by four.

**Roger** Yes, we'll only just manage to fit it in. I mean, we'll only just do it. I mean . . .

**Vicki** Right, then.

**Roger** (*putting down the box and opening the flight bag*) We won't bother to chill the champagne.

**Vicki** All these doors!

**Roger** Oh, only a handful, really. (*He opens the various doors one after another to demonstrate.*) Study. . . Kitchen . . . And a self-contained service flat for the housekeeper.

**Vicki** Terrific. And which one's the . . . ?

**Roger** What?

**Vicki** You know . . .

**Roger** The usual offices? Through here. (*He opens the downstairs bathroom door for her.*)

**Vicki** Fantastic.

*Exit Vicki into the bathroom.*

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, without the newspaper.*

**Mrs Clackett** Now I've lost the sardines . . .

*Mutual surprise. Roger closes the door to the bathroom and slips the champagne back into the bag.*

**Roger** I'm sorry. I thought there was no one here.

**Mrs Clackett** I'm not here. I'm off, only it's the royal you know, where they wear those hats, and they're all covered in fruit, and who are you?

**Roger** I'm from the agents.

**Mrs Clackett** From the agents?

**Roger** Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.

**Mrs Clackett** Oh. Which one are you, then? Squire, Squire, Hackham, or Dudley?

**Roger** I'm Tramplemain.

**Mrs Clackett** Walking in here as if you owned the place! I thought you was a burglar.

**Roger** No, I just dropped in to . . . go into a few things . . .

*The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it.*

Well, to check some of the measurements . . .

*The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it.*

Do one or two odd jobs . . .

*The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it.*

Oh, and a client. I'm showing a prospective tenant over the house.

*The bathroom door opens.*

**Vicki** What's wrong with this door?

**Roger** *closes it.*

**Roger** She's thinking of renting it. Her interest is definitely aroused.

*Enter Vicki from bathroom.*

**Vicki** That's not the bedroom.

**Roger** The bedroom? No, that's the downstairs bathroom and WC suite. And this is the housekeeper, Mrs Crockett.

**Mrs Clackett** Clackett, dear, Clackett.

**Vicki** Oh. Hi.

**Roger** She's not really here.

**Mrs Clackett** Only it's the royal, you know, with the hats.

**Roger** (to **Mrs Clackett**) Don't worry about us.

**Mrs Clackett** (*picks up the sardines*) I'll have the sound on low.

**Roger** We'll just inspect the house.

**Mrs Clackett** Only now I've lost the newspaper.

*Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, carrying the sardines.*

*Only she leaves them behind.*

**Lloyd** Sardines!

**Roger** I'm sorry about this.

**Vicki** That's all right. We don't want the television, do we?

**Lloyd** Sardines!

*Enter Dotty from the study.*

**Dotty** I've forgotten the sardines.

**Garry** Lloyd! These sardines! They're driving us all mad!

**Lloyd** Something wrong with the sardines? Poppy!

**Garry** There's four plates of sardines coming on in Act One alone! They go here, they go there. *She* takes them – *I* take them. (*To Brooke.*) I mean, don't *you* feel, you know?

**Brooke** (*elsewhere again*) Sorry?

**Garry** The sardines.

**Brooke** What sardines?

*Enter Poppy, the assistant stage manager, from the wings.*

**Poppy** Change the sardines?

**Lloyd** Make it four grilled turbot. Off the bone.

**Garry (to Lloyd)** OK, it's all right for you. You're sitting out there. We're up here. We've got to *do* it. Plus we've got bags, we've got boxes. Plus doors. Plus words. You know what I mean?

**Dotty** We're not getting at you, Poppy, love. We think the sardines are lovely.

**Garry** I'm just trying to, you know.

**Lloyd** So what *do* you want to change, Garry? The bags? The boxes? The doors?

**Dotty** We can't start *changing* things now, love!

**Garry** I'm just *saying*. Words. Doors. Bags. Boxes. Sardines. *Us*. OK? I've made my point?

**Lloyd** You certainly have, Garry. Got that, Poppy?

**Poppy** Um. Well.

**Lloyd** Right. On we go. From Dotty's exit. And Poppy . . .

**Poppy** Yes?

**Lloyd** Don't let this happen again.

**Poppy** Oh. No.

*Exit Poppy into the wings.*

**Garry** Sorry, Lloyd. I just thought we ought to, do you know what I mean?

**Lloyd** Of course.

**Garry** Better out than, you know.

**Lloyd** Much better. As long as Dotty's happy.

**Dotty** Absolutely happy, Lloyd, my love.

*She goes to the study door.*

**Lloyd** Will you do something for me then, Dotty, my precious?

**Dotty** Anything, Lloyd, my sweet.

**Lloyd** Take the sardines off with you.

*Exit Mrs Clackett into study, carrying the sardines.*

**Roger** I'm sorry about this.

**Vicki** That's all right. We don't want the television, do we?

**Roger** Only she's been in the family for generations.

**Vicki** Great. Come on, then. (*She starts upstairs.*) I've got to be in Basingstoke by four.

**Roger** Perhaps we should just have a glass of champagne.

**Vicki** We'll take it up with us.

**Roger** Yes. Well . . .

**Vicki** And don't let my files out of sight.

**Roger** No. Only . . .

**Vicki** What?

**Roger** Well . . .

**Vicki** Her?

**Roger** She *has* been in the family for generations.

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, with the newspaper but without the sardines.*

**Mrs Clackett** Sardines . . . Sardines . . . It's not for me to say, of course, dear, only I will just say this: don't think twice about it – take the plunge. You'll really enjoy it here.

**Vicki** Oh. Great.

**Mrs Clackett (to Roger)** Won't she, love?

**Roger** Yes. Well. Yes!

**Mrs Clackett (to Vicki)** And we'll enjoy having you. (*To Roger.*) Won't we, love?

**Roger** Oh. Well.

**Vicki** Terrific.

**Mrs Clackett** Sardines, sardines. Can't put your feet up on an empty stomach, can you.

*Exit Mrs Clackett to service quarters.*

**Vicki** You see? She thinks it's great. She's even making us sardines!

**Roger** Well . . .

**Vicki** I think she's terrific.

**Roger** Terrific.

**Vicki** So which way?

**Roger** (*picking up the bags*) All right. Before she comes back with the sardines.

**Vicki** Up here?

**Roger** Yes, yes.

**Vicki** In here?

**Roger** Yes, yes, yes.

*Exeunt Roger and Vicki into mezzanine bathroom.*

**Vicki** (*off*) It's another bathroom.

*They reappear.*

**Roger** No, no, no.

**Vicki** Always trying to get me into bathrooms.

**Roger** I mean in *here*.

*He nods at the next door – the first along the gallery. Vicki leads the way in. Roger follows.*

**Vicki** Oh, black sheets! (*She produces one.*)

**Roger** It's the airing cupboard. (*He throws the sheet back.*) This one, this one.

*He drops the bag and box, and struggles nervously to open the second door along the gallery, the bedroom.*

**Vicki** Oh, you're in a real state! You can't even get the door open.

*Exeunt **Roger** and **Vicki** into the bedroom.*

*Only they can't, because the bedroom door won't open.*

*The sound of a key in the lock, and the front door opens. On the doorstep stands **Philip**, carrying a cardboard box. He is in his forties, with a deep suntan, and writes attractive new plays with a charming period atmosphere.*

**Philip** . . . No, it's Mrs Clackett's afternoon off, remember.

**Lloyd** Hold it.

*Enter **Flavia**, carrying a flight bag like **Roger's**. She is in her thirties, the perfect companion piece to the above.*

**Lloyd** Hold it.

**Philip** We've got the place entirely to ourselves.

**Philip** *closes the door.*

*Only the door won't stay closed. A pause, while **Garry** struggles to open the door upstairs, and **Frederick** struggles to close the door downstairs.*

**Lloyd** And God said, Hold it. And they held it. And God saw that it was terrible.

**Garry** (*to **Frederick** and **Belinda**, the actor and actress playing **Philip** and **Flavia***) Sorry, loves, this door won't open.

**Belinda** Sorry, love, this door won't close.

**Lloyd** And God said, 'Poppy!'

**Frederick** Sorry, everyone. Am I doing something wrong? You know how stupid I am about doors.

**Belinda** Freddie, my sweet, you're doing it perfectly.

**Frederick** As long as it's not me that's broken it.

*Enter Poppy from the wings.*

**Lloyd** And there was Poppy. And God said, Be fruitful and multiply, and fetch Tim to fix the doors.

*Exit Poppy into the wings.*

**Belinda** Oh, I love technicals!

**Garry** She loves technicals! (*Fondly.*) Isn't she just, I mean, honestly, she loves technicals! Dotty! Where's Dotty?

**Belinda** Everyone's always so nice to everyone.

**Garry** Oh! Isn't she just, I mean, she really is, isn't she.

*Enter Dotty from the service quarters.*

**Garry** (*to Dotty*) Belinda's being all, you know.

**Belinda** But Freddie, my precious, don't *you* like a nice all-night technical?

**Frederick** The only thing I like about technicals is you get a chance to sit on the furniture. (*He sits.*)

**Belinda** Oh, Freddie, my precious! It's lovely to see you cheering up and making jokes.

*She sits beside him and embraces him.*

**Frederick** Oh, was that a joke?

**Belinda** This is such a lovely company to work with. It's such a happy company.

**Dotty** Wait till we've got to Stockton-on-Tees in twelve weeks time.

**Belinda** (*sits*) Are you all right, Lloyd, my precious?

**Lloyd** I'm starting to know what God felt like when he sat out there in the darkness creating the world. (*He takes a pill.*)

**Belinda** What did he feel like, Lloyd, my love?

**Lloyd** Very pleased he'd taken his Valium.

**Belinda** He had six days, of course. We've only got six hours.

**Lloyd** And God said, 'Where the fuck is Tim?'

*Enter from the wings Tim, the company stage manager. He is exhausted.*

**Lloyd** And there the fuck was Tim. And God said, 'Let there be doors, that open when they open, and close when they close.'

**Tim** Do something?

**Lloyd** Doors.

**Tim** I was doing the front of house.

**Lloyd** Doors.

**Tim** Doors?

**Lloyd** Tim, are you fully awake?

**Belinda** Lloyd, he *has* been putting the set up all weekend.

**Lloyd** You're not trying to do too much, are you, Tim?

**Belinda** Tim, my love, this door won't close.

**Garry** And the bedroom won't, you know.

**Tim** Oh, right. (*He sets to work on the doors.*)

**Belinda** (*to Lloyd*) He hasn't been to bed for forty-eight hours.

**Lloyd** Don't worry, Tim. Only another twenty-four hours, and it'll be the end of the day.

**Lloyd** *comes up on stage.*

**Belinda** Oh, look, he's come down to earth amongst us.

**Lloyd** Listen. Since we've stopped anyway. OK, it took two days to get the set up, so we shan't have time for a dress rehearsal. Don't worry. Think of the first night as a dress rehearsal. If we can just get through the play once tonight for doors and sardines. That's what it's all about. Doors and sardines. Getting on – getting off. Getting the sardines on – getting the sardines off. That's farce. That's the theatre. That's life.

**Belinda** Oh, Lloyd, you're so deep.

**Lloyd** So just keep going. Bang, bang, bang. Bang you're on. Bang you've said it. Bang you're off. And everything will be perfectly . . . where's Selsdon?

**Belinda** Oh no!

**Garry** Not already?

**Belinda** Selsdon!

**Garry** Selsdon!

**Lloyd** Poppy!

**Dotty** (to **Lloyd**) I thought he was in front, with you?

**Lloyd** I thought he was round the back, with you?

*Enter **Poppy** from the wings.*

**Lloyd** Is Mr Mowbray in his dressing-room?

*Exit **Poppy** into the wings.*

**Frederick** Oh, I don't think he would. Not at a technical. (To **Brooke**.) Would he?

**Brooke** Would who?

**Garry** Selsdon. We can't find him!

**Frederick** I'm sure he wouldn't. Not at a technical.

**Dotty** Half a chance, he would.

**Brooke** Would what?

**Garry, Dotty and Lloyd** *make gestures to her of tipping a glass, or raising the elbow, or screwing the nose.*

**Belinda** Now come on, my sweets, be fair! We don't know.

**Frederick** Let's not jump to any conclusions.

**Lloyd** Let's just get the understudy dressed. Tim!

**Tim** Yes?

**Lloyd** Hurry up with those doors. You're going on as the Burglar.

**Tim** Oh. Right.

**Dotty** He shouldn't have been out of sight! I said, he must never be out of sight!

**Belinda** He's been as good as gold all the way through rehearsals.

**Garry** Yes, because in the rehearsal room it was all, I don't know, but there we were, do you know what I mean?

**Lloyd** There was no set. You could see everyone.

**Garry** And here it's all, you know.

**Lloyd** Split into two. There's a front and a back. And instantly we've lost him.

*Enter Poppy from the wings.*

**Poppy** He's not in the dressing-room.

**Dotty** You've looked in the lavatories?

**Poppy** Yes.

**Dotty** And the scenery dock and the prop room and the paint store?

**Poppy** Yes.

**Frederick (to Dotty)** You've worked with him before, of course.

**Lloyd** (to **Poppy**) Ring the police.

*Exit **Poppy** into the wings.*

**Lloyd** (to **Tim**) Finished the doors? Right, get the Burglar gear on.

*Exit **Tim** into the wings.*

*Enter **Selsdon Mowbray** from the back of the stalls. He is in his seventies and is wearing his **Burglar** gear. He comes down the aisle during the following dialogue and stands in front of the stage, watching everyone on it.*

**Lloyd** I'm sorry, Dotty, my love.

**Dotty** No, it's my fault, Lloyd, my love.

**Lloyd** I cast him.

**Dotty** 'Let's give him one last chance,' I said. 'One last chance!' I mean, what can you do? We were in weekly rep together in Peebles.

**Garry** (to **Dotty**) It's my fault, my precious. I shouldn't have let you. This tour for her isn't just, do you know what I mean? This is her life savings!

**Lloyd** We know that, Garry, love.

**Belinda** *puts a hand on Dotty's arm.*

**Dotty** I'm not trying to make my fortune.

**Frederick** Of course you're not, Dotty.

**Dotty** I just wanted to put a little something by.

**Belinda** We know, love.

**Garry** Just something to buy a little house that she could, I mean, come on, that's not so much to ask.

**Brooke** *puts a hand to her eye.*

**Belinda** (to **Brooke**) Don't *you* cry, my sweet! It's not *your* fault!

**Brook** No, I've got something behind my lens.

**Frederick** Yes, you couldn't expect Brooke to keep anyone in sight.

**Dotty** (*pointing at Selsdon without seeing him*) But he was standing right there in the stalls before we started! I saw him!

**Brooke** Who are we talking about now?

**Belinda** It's all right, my sweet. We know you can't see anything.

**Brooke** You mean *Selsdon*? I'm not *blind*. I can see *Selsdon*.

*They all turn and see him.*

**Belinda** Selsdon!

**Garry** Oh my God, he's here all the time!

**Lloyd** Standing there like Hamlet's father.

**Frederick** My word, Selsdon, you gave us a surprise. We thought you were . . . We thought you were . . . not there.

**Dotty** Where have you been, Selsdon?

**Belinda** Are you all right, Selsdon?

**Lloyd** Speak to us!

**Selsdon** Is it a party?

**Belinda** 'Is it a party?'

**Selsdon** Is it? How killing! I got it into my head there was going to be a rehearsal. (*He goes up on to the stage.*) I was having a little postprandial snooze at the back of the stalls so as to be ready for the rehearsal.

**Belinda** Isn't he lovely?

**Lloyd** Much lovelier now we can see him.

**Selsdon** So what are we celebrating?

**Belinda** 'What are we celebrating?'

*Enter Tim from the wings.*

**Tim** I've looked all through his dressing-room. I've looked all through the wardrobe. I can't find the gear.

**Lloyd** *indicates Selsdon*

**Tim** Oh.

**Selsdon** Beer? In the wardrobe?

**Lloyd** No, Selsdon. Tim, you need a break. Why don't you sit down quietly upstairs and do all the company's VAT?

**Tim** VAT, right.

**Lloyd** (*discreetly*) And Tim – just in case he and the gear *do* walk off together one night, order yourself a spare Burglar costume.

**Tim** Spare Burglar costume.

**Lloyd** Two spare Burglar costumes. One to fit you, one to fit Poppy. I want a plentiful supply of spare Burglars on hand for any eventuality.

**Tim** Two spare Burglars.

*Exit Tim into the wings.*

**Belinda** He has been on his feet for forty-eight hours, Lloyd.

**Lloyd** (*calling*) Don't fall down, Tim. We may not be insured.

**Selsdon** So what's next on the bill?

**Lloyd** Well, Selsdon, I thought we might try a spot of rehearsal.

**Selsdon** Oh, I won't, thank you.

**Lloyd** You *won't*?

**Selsdon** You all go ahead. I'll sit and watch you. This is the beer in the wardrobe, is it?

**Belinda** No, my sweet, he wants us to rehearse.

**Selsdon** Yes, but I think we've got to rehearse, haven't we?

**Lloyd** Rehearse, yes! Well done, Selsdon. I knew you'd think of

something. Right, from Belinda and Freddie's entrance . . .

*Enter Poppy from the wings, alarmed.*

**Poppy** Lloyd . . .

**Lloyd** What? What's happened now?

**Poppy** The police!

**Lloyd** The *police*?

**Poppy** They've found an old man. He was lying unconscious in a doorway just across the street.

**Lloyd** Oh. Yes. Thank you.

**Poppy** They say he's very dirty and rather smelly, and I thought oh my God, because . . .

**Lloyd** Thank you, Poppy.

**Poppy** Because when you get close to Selsdon . . .

**Belinda** Poppy!

**Poppy** No, I mean, if you stand anywhere near Selsdon you can't help noticing this very distinctive. . . (*She stops, sniffing.*)

**Selsdon** (*putting his arm round her*) I'll tell you something, Poppy. Once you've got it in your nostrils you never forget it. Sixty years now and the smell of the theatre still haunts me.

*Exit Selsdon into the study.*

**Belinda** Oh, bless him!

**Lloyd** Tell me, Poppy, love – how did you get a job like this, that requires tact and understanding? You're not somebody's girlfriend, are you?

**Poppy** *gives him a startled look.*

**Belinda** Don't worry, Poppy, my sweet. He truly did not hear.

*Enter Selsdon from the study.*

**Selsdon** *Not here?*

**Lloyd** Yes, yes, there!

**Belinda** Sit down, my precious.

**Dotty** Go back to sleep.

**Lloyd** You're not on for another twenty pages yet.

*Exit Selsdon into the study. Exit Poppy into the wings.*

**Lloyd** And on we go.

*He goes back down into the auditorium.*

Dotty in the kitchen, wildly roasting sardines. Freddie and Belinda waiting impatiently outside the front door. Garry and Brooke disappearing tremulously into the bedroom. Time sliding irrevocably into the past.

*Exeunt Dotty into the service quarters, Garry and Brooke upstairs into the bedroom, and Frederick through the front door.*

**Belinda** *(to Lloyd, with lowered voice)* Aren't they sweet?

**Lloyd** What?

**Belinda** *(points to the bedroom and the service quarters)* Garry and Dotty.

**Lloyd** Garry and Dotty?

**Belinda** Sh!

**Lloyd** *(lowers his voice)* What? You mean they're an item? Those two? Tramplemain and Mrs Clackett?

**Belinda** It's supposed to be a secret.

**Lloyd** But she's old enough to be . . .

**Belinda** Sh! Didn't you know?

**Lloyd** I'm just God, Belinda, love. I'm just the one with the English degree, I don't know anything.

*Enter Garry from the bedroom.*

**Garry** What's happening?

**Lloyd** I don't like to imagine, Garry, honey.

*Exit Belinda through the front door.*

**Garry** I mean, what are we waiting for?

*Enter Dotty from the service quarters, inquiringly.*

**Lloyd** I don't know what you're waiting for, Garry. Her sixteenth birthday?

**Garry** What?

**Lloyd** Or maybe just the cue. Brooke!

*Exit Dotty to the service quarters.*

*Enter Brooke from the bedroom.*

**Lloyd** 'Oh, you're in a real state.'

<p><b>Vicki</b> Oh, you're in a real state! You can't even get the door open.</p>
---

**Lloyd** Door closed, love.

**Garry** *closes the door.*

<p><b>Vicki</b> You can't even get the door open.</p>
---

<p><i>Exeunt Roger and Vicki into the bedroom.</i></p>
--

<p><i>Enter Philip through the front door.</i></p>
--

<p><b>Philip</b> No, it's Mrs Clackett's afternoon off, remember.</p>
---

<p><i>Enter Flavia, carrying a flight bag like Roger's.</i></p>
---

<p><b>Philip</b> We've got the place entirely to ourselves.</p>
---

<p><b>Philip</b> <i>closes the door.</i></p>
--

**Flavia** Home!

**Philip** Home, sweet home!

**Flavia** Dear old house!

**Philip** Just waiting for us to come back!

**Flavia** It's rather funny, though, creeping in like this for our wedding anniversary!

**Philip** It's damned serious! If Inland Revenue find out we're in the country, even for one night, bang goes our claim to be resident abroad. Bang goes most of this year's income. I feel like an illegal immigrant.

**Flavia** I'll tell you what I feel like.

**Philip** Champagne? (*He takes a bottle out of the box.*)

**Flavia** I wonder if Mrs Clackett's aired the beds.

**Philip** Darling!

**Flavia** Well, why not? No children. No friends dropping in. We're absolutely on our own.

**Philip** True. (*He picks up the bag and box, and ushers Flavia towards the stairs.*) There is something to be said for being a tax exile.

**Flavia** Leave those!

*He drops the bag and box, and kisses her. She flees upstairs, laughing, and he after her.*

**Philip** Sh!

**Flavia** What?

**Philip** (*humorously*) Inland Revenue may hear us!

*They creep to the bedroom door.*

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters, carrying a fresh plate of sardines.*

**Mrs Clackett** (*to herself*) What I did with that first lot of sardines I shall never know.

*She puts the sardines on the telephone table and sits on the sofa.*

**Philip and Flavia** (*looking down from the gallery*) Mrs Clackett!

**Mrs Clackett** *jumps up.*

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, you give me a turn! My heart jumped right out of my boots!

**Philip** So did mine!

**Flavia** We thought you'd gone!

**Mrs Clackett** I thought you was in Spain!

**Philip** We are! We are!

**Flavia** You haven't seen us!

**Philip** We're not here!

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, like that, is it? The income tax are after you?

**Flavia** They would be, if they knew we were here.

**Mrs Clackett** All right, then, love. You're not here. I haven't seen you. Anybody asks for you, I don't know nothing. Off to bed, are you?

**Philip** Oh . . .

**Flavia** Well . . .

**Mrs Clackett** That's right. Nowhere like bed when they all get on top of you. You'll want your things, look. (*She indicates the bag and box.*)

**Philip** Oh. Yes. Thanks.

*He comes downstairs, and picks up the bag and box.*

**Mrs Clackett** (*to Flavia*) Oh, and that bed hasn't been aired, love.

**Flavia** I'll get a hot-water bottle.

*Exit Flavia into the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Mrs Clackett** I've put all your letters in the study, dear.

**Philip** Letters? What letters? You forward all the mail, don't you?

**Mrs Clackett** Not the ones from the income tax, dear. I don't want to spoil your holidays.

**Philip** Oh, good heavens! Where are they?

**Mrs Clackett** I've put them all in the pigeonhouse.

**Philip** In the *pigeonhouse*?

**Mrs Clackett** In the little pigeonhouse in your desk, love.

*Exeunt Mrs Clackett and Philip into the study. Philip is still holding the bag and box.*

*Only he remains on and Dotty remains in the doorway waiting for him.*

*Enter Roger from the bedroom, still dressed, tying his tie.*

**Roger** Yes, but I could hear voices!

*Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear.*

**Vicki** Voices? What sort of voices?

**Lloyd** Hold it. Freddie, what's the trouble?

**Frederick** Lloyd, you know how stupid I am about moves. Sorry, Garry . . . Sorry, Brooke . . . It's just my usual dimness. (*To Lloyd.*) But why do I take the things off into the study? Wouldn't it be more natural if I left them on?

**Lloyd** No.

**Frederick** I thought it might be somehow more logical.

**Lloyd** No.

**Frederick** Lloyd, I know it's a bit late in the day to go into all this.  
..

**Lloyd** Freddie, we've got several more minutes left before we open.

*Enter Belinda from the mezzanine bathroom, to wait patiently.*

**Frederick** Thank you, Lloyd. As long as we're not too pushed. But I've never understood why he carries an overnight bag and a box of groceries into the study to look at his mail.

**Garry** Because they have to be out of the way for my next scene!

**Frederick** I see that.

**Belinda** And Freddie, my sweet, Selsdon needs them in the study for *his* scene.

**Frederick** I see that . . .

**Lloyd** (*comes up on stage*) Selsdon . . . where is he? Is he there?

**Belinda** (*calling, urgently*) Selsdon!

**Dotty** (*likewise*) Selsdon!

**Garry** (*likewise*) Selsdon!

*A pane of glass shatters in the mullion window, and an arm comes through and releases the catch. Enter an elderly **Burglar**. He has great character, but is in need of extensive repair and modernisation.*

**Burglar** No bars, no burglar alarm. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement . . .

*He becomes aware of the others.*

**Selsdon** No?

**Lloyd** No. Not yet. Thank you, Selsdon.

**Selsdon** I thought I heard my name.

**Lloyd** No, no, no. Back to sleep, Selsdon. Another ten pages before

the big moment.

**Selsdon** I'm so sorry.

**Lloyd** Not at all. Nice to see you. Poppy, put the glass back in the window.

*Enter Poppy. She puts the glass back.*

**Lloyd** And, Selsdon . . .

**Selsdon** Yes?

**Lloyd** Beautiful performance.

**Selsdon** Oh, how kind of you. I don't think I'm quite there yet, though.

*Exit Selsdon through the window.*

**Lloyd** He even remembered the line.

**Frederick** All right, I see all that.

**Lloyd** (*faintly*) Oh, no!

**Frederick** I just don't know why I take them.

**Lloyd** *comes up on stage.*

**Lloyd** Freddie, love, why does anyone do anything? Why does that other idiot walk out through the front door holding two plates of sardines? (*To Garry.*) I'm not getting at you, love.

**Garry** Of course not, love. (*To Frederick.*) I mean, why do I? (*To Lloyd.*) I mean, right, when you come to think about it, why *do* I?

**Lloyd** Who knows? The wellsprings of human action are deep and cloudy. (*To Frederick.*) Maybe something happened to you as a very small child which made you frightened to let go of groceries.

**Belinda** Or it could be genetic.

**Garry** Yes, or it could be, you know.

**Lloyd** It could well be.

**Frederick** Of course. Thank you. I understand all that. But . . .

**Lloyd** Freddie, love, I'm telling you – I don't know. I don't think the author knows. I don't know why the author came into this industry in the first place. I don't know why any of us came into it.

**Frederick** All the same, if you could just give me a reason I could keep in my mind . . .

**Lloyd** All right, I'll give you a reason. You carry those groceries into the study, Freddie, honey, because it's just slightly after midnight, and we're not going to be finished before we open tomorrow night. Correction – before we open *tonight*.

**Frederick** *nods, rebuked, and exits into the study.* **Dotty** *silently follows him.* **Garry and Brooke** *go silently back into the bedroom.*

**Lloyd** *returns to the stalls.*

**Lloyd** And on we go. From after Freddie's exit, *with* the groceries.

**Belinda** *(keeping her voice down)* Lloyd, sweetheart, his wife left him this morning.

**Lloyd** Oh. *(Pause.)* Freddie!

*Enter Frederick, still wounded, from the study.*

**Lloyd** I think the point is that you've had a great fright when she mentions income tax, and you feel very insecure and exposed, and you want something familiar to hold on to.

**Frederick** *(with humble gratitude)* Thank you, Lloyd. *(He clutches the groceries to his chest.)* That's most helpful.

*Exit Frederick into the study.*

**Belinda** *(to Lloyd)* Bless you, my sweet.

**Lloyd** *(leaves the stage)* And on we merrily go.

*Exit Belinda into the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Lloyd** 'Yes, but I could hear voices . . .'

*Enter Roger from the bedroom, still dressed, tying his tie.*

**Roger** Yes, but I could hear voices!

*Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear.*

**Vicki** Voices? What sort of voices?

**Roger** People's voices.

**Vicki** But there's no one here.

**Roger** Darling, I saw the door handle move! It could be someone from the office, checking up.

**Vicki** I still don't see why you've got to put your tie on to look.

**Roger** Mrs Crackett.

**Vicki** Mrs Crackett?

**Roger** One has to set an example to the staff.

**Vicki** (*looks over the bannisters*) Oh, look, she's opened our sardines.

*She moves to go downstairs. Roger grabs her.*

**Roger** Come back!

**Vicki** What?

**Roger** I'll fetch them! You can't go downstairs like that.

**Vicki** Why not?

**Roger** Mrs Crackett.

**Vicki** Mrs Crackett?

**Roger** One has certain obligations.

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the study. She is carrying the first plate of sardines.*

**Mrs Clackett** (*to herself*) Sardines here. Sardines there. It's like a Sunday school outing.

**Roger** *pushes Vicki through the first available door, which happens*

*to be the linen cupboard.*

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, you're still poking around, are you?

**Roger** Yes, still poking . . . well, still around.

**Mrs Clackett** In the airing cupboard, were you?

**Roger** No, no.

*The linen cupboard door begins to open. He slams it shut.*

Well, just checking the sheets and pillowcases. Going through the inventory.

*He starts downstairs.*

Mrs Blackett . . .

**Mrs Clackett** Clackett, dear, Clackett.

*She puts down the sardines beside the other sardines.*

**Roger** Mrs Clackett. Is there anyone else in the house, Mrs Clackett?

**Mrs Clackett** I haven't seen no one, dear.

**Roger** I thought I heard voices.

**Mrs Clackett** Voices? There's no voices here, love.

**Roger** I must have imagined it.

**Philip (off)** Oh, good Lord above!

**Roger**, *with his back to her, picks up both plates of sardines.*

**Roger** I beg your pardon?

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, good Lord above, the study door's open.

*She crosses and closes it. Roger looks out of the window.*

**Roger** There's another car outside! That's not Mr Hackham's, is it? Or Mr Dudley's?

*Exit Roger through the front door, holding both plates of sardines.*

*Enter Flavia from the mezzanine bathroom, carrying a hot water bottle. She sees the linen cupboard door swinging open as she passes, pushes it shut and turns the key.*

**Flavia** Nothing but flapping doors in this house.

*Exit Flavia into the bedroom.*

*Enter from the study Philip, holding a tax demand and its envelope.*

**Philip** ‘. . . final notice . . . steps will be taken . . . distraint . . . proceedings in court . . .’

**Mrs Clackett** Oh yes, and that reminds me, a gentleman come about the house.

**Philip** Don’t tell me. I’m not here.

**Mrs Clackett** He says he’s got a lady quite aroused.

**Philip** Leave everything to Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.

**Mrs Clackett** All right, love. I’ll let them go all over, shall I?

**Philip** Let them do anything. Just so long as you don’t tell anyone we’re here.

**Mrs Clackett** So I’ll just sit down and turn on the . . . sardines, I’ve forgotten the sardines! I don’t know – if it wasn’t fixed to my shoulders I’d forget what day it was.

*Exit Mrs Clackett to the service quarters.*

**Philip** I didn’t get this! I’m not here. I’m in Spain. But if I didn’t get it I didn’t open it.

*Enter Flavia from the bedroom. She is holding the dress that Vicki arrived in.*

**Flavia** Darling, I never had a dress like this, did I?

**Philip** (*abstracted*) Didn’t you?

**Flavia** I shouldn't buy anything as tarty as this . . . Oh, it's not something you gave me, is it?

**Philip** I should never have touched it.

**Flavia** No, it's lovely.

**Philip** Stick it down. Put it back. Never saw it.

*Exit Philip into study.*

**Flavia** Well, I'll put it in the attic, with all the other things you gave me that are too precious to wear.

*Exit Flavia along the upstairs corridor.*

*Enter Roger through the front door, still carrying both plates of sardines.*

**Roger** All right, all right . . . Now the study door's open again! What's going on?

*He puts the sardines down – one plate on the telephone table, where it was before, one near the front door – and goes towards the study, but stops at the sound of urgent knocking overhead.*

Knocking!

*Knocking.*

Upstairs!

*He runs upstairs. Knocking.*

Oh my God, there's something in the airing cupboard!

*He unlocks it and opens it. Enter Vicki.*

**Roger** Oh, it's you.

**Vicki** Of course it's me! You put me in here! In the dark! With all black sheets and things!

**Roger** But, darling, why did you lock the door?

**Vicki** Why did *I* lock the door? Why did *you* lock the door!

**Roger** *I didn't lock the door!*

**Vicki** *Someone locked the door!*

**Roger** *Anyway, we can't stand here like this.*

**Vicki** *Like what?*

**Roger** *In your underwear.*

**Vicki** *OK, I'll take it off.*

**Roger** *In here, in here!*

*He ushers her into the bedroom.*

*Only she remains on, blinking anxiously and peering about the floor.  
Garry waits for her, holding the bedroom door open.*

*Enter Philip from the study, holding the tax demand, the envelope,  
and a tube of glue.*

**Philip** *Darling, this glue. Is it the sort you can never get  
unstuck . . . ?*

**Lloyd** *Hold it.*

**Philip** *Oh, Mrs Clackett's made us some sardines.*

**Lloyd** *Hold it. We have a problem.*

**Frederick (to Brooke)** *Oh, bad luck! Which one is it this time?*

**Brooke** *Left.*

**Garry (calling to people, off)** *It's the left one, everybody!*

**Omnes (off)** *Left one!*

*Enter Dotty, Belinda, and Poppy.*

**Frederick** *It could be anywhere.*

**Garry (looks over the edge of the gallery)** *It could have gone over*

the thing and fallen down, you know, and then bounced somewhere else again.

**Brooke** *comes downstairs. They all search hopelessly.*

**Poppy** Where did you last see it?

**Belinda** She *didn't* see it, poor sweet! It was in her eye!

**Garry** (*coming downstairs*) It was probably on 'Why did I lock the door?' She opens her eyes very sort of, you know. Don't you, my sweet? I always feel I ought to rush forward and –

*He rushes forward, hands held out.*

**Dotty** Mind where you put your feet, my love.

**Frederick** Yes, everyone look under their feet.

**Garry** No one move their feet.

**Belinda** Everyone put their feet back exactly where they were.

**Frederick** Pick your feet up one by one.

*They all trample about, looking under their feet, except Brooke, who crouches with her good eye at floor level. Lloyd comes up on stage.*

**Lloyd** Brooke, love, is this going to happen during a performance? We don't want the audience to miss their last buses and trains.

**Belinda** She'll just carry on. Won't you, my love?

**Frederick** But can she see anything without them?

**Lloyd** Can she hear anything without them?

**Brooke** (*suddenly realising that she is being addressed*) Sorry?

*She straightens up sharply. Her head comes into abrupt contact with Poppy's face.*

**Poppy** Ugh!

**Brooke** Oh. Sorry.

**Brooke** *jumps up to see what damage she has done to Poppy, and steps*

*backward on to Garry's hand.*

**Garry** Ugh!

**Brooke** Sorry.

**Dotty** *hurries to his aid.*

**Dotty** Oh my poor darling! (*To Brooke.*) You stood on his hand!

**Frederick** Oh dear. (*He hurriedly clasps a handkerchief to his nose.*)

**Belinda** Oh, look at Freddie, the poor love!

**Lloyd** What's the matter with *him*?

**Belinda** He's just got a little nosebleed, my sweet.

**Lloyd** A nosebleed? No one touched him!

**Belinda** No, he's got a thing about violence. It always makes his nose bleed.

**Frederick** (*from behind his handkerchief*) I'm so sorry.

**Lloyd** Brooke, sweetheart. . .

**Brooke** I thought you said something to me.

**Lloyd** Yes. (*He picks up a vase and hands it to her.*) Just go and hit the box-office manager with this and you'll have finished off live theatre in Weston-super-Mare.

**Brooke** Anyway, I've found it.

**Belinda** She's found it!

**Dotty** Where was it, love?

**Brooke** In my eye.

**Garry** In her eye!

**Belinda** (*hugging her*) Well done, my sweet.

**Lloyd** Not in your left eye?

**Brooke** It had gone round the side.

**Belinda** I knew it hadn't gone far. Are you all right, Poppy, my sweet?

**Poppy** I think so.

**Belinda** Freddie?

**Frederick** Fine, fine. (*He gets to his feet, looks in his handkerchief, and has to sit down again.*) I'm so sorry.

**Lloyd** Now what?

**Belinda** He's just feeling a little faint, my love. He's got this thing about . . . (*She tries to demonstrate.*)

**Lloyd** This thing about what?

**Belinda** Well, I won't say the word.

**Frederick** *gets to his feet.*

**Lloyd** You mean blood?

**Frederick** Oh dear. (*He has to sit down again.*)

**Belinda** (to **Frederick**) We all understand, my precious.

**Lloyd** All right, clear the stage. Walking wounded carry the stretcher cases.

**Lloyd** *returns to the stalls, Dotty to the service quarters, Poppy to the wings. Garry and Brooke go upstairs. Belinda helps Frederick to his feet.*

**Lloyd** Right, then. On we bloodily stagger.

**Frederick** *has to reach for a chair again.*

**Lloyd** Oh, sorry, Freddie. Let me rephrase that. On we blindly stumble. Brooke, I withdraw that.

*Exit Belinda along the upstairs corridor, Frederick into study.*

**Lloyd** From your exit, anyway. 'OK, I'll take it off . . . In here, in

here.' Where's Selsdon?

**Garry** Selsdon!

**Lloyd** Selsdon!

*Enter Selsdon through the front door.*

**Selsdon** I think she might have dropped it out here somewhere.

**Lloyd** Good. Keep looking. Only another five pages, Selsdon.

*Exit Selsdon through the front door.*

**Lloyd** 'Anyway, we can't stand here like this. – Like what?. – In your underwear. – OK, I'll take it off.'

**Roger** In here, in here!

*He ushers her into the bedroom.*

*Enter Philip from the study, holding the tax demand, the envelope and a tube of glue.*

**Philip** Darling, this glue. Is it the sort you can never get unstuck . . . ? Oh, Mrs Clackett's made us some sardines.

*Exit Philip into the study with the tax demand, envelope, glue and one of the plates of sardines from the telephone table.*

*Enter Roger from the bedroom, holding the hot water bottle. He looks up and down the landing.*

*Enter Vicki from the bedroom.*

**Vicki** Now what?

**Roger** A hot-water bottle! *I* didn't put it there!

**Vicki** *I* didn't put it there.

**Roger** Someone in the bathroom, filling hot-water bottles.

*Exit Roger into the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Vicki (anxious)** You don't think there's something creepy going

on?

*Exit Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom.*

*Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor.*

**Flavia** Darling, are you coming to bed or aren't you?

*Exit Flavia into the bedroom.*

**Roger** What did you say?

**Vicki** I didn't say anything.

**Roger** I mean, first the door handle. Now the hot-water bottle .  
. . .

**Vicki** I can feel goose pimples all over.

**Roger** Yes, quick, get something round you.

**Vicki** Get the covers over our heads.

**Roger** *is about to open the bedroom door.*

**Roger** Just a moment. What did I do with those sardines?

*He goes downstairs. Vicki makes to follow.*

**Roger** You – wait here.

**Vicki** *(uneasily)* You hear all sorts of funny things about these old houses.

**Roger** Yes, but this one has been extensively modernised throughout. I can't see how anything creepy would survive oil-fired central heating and . . .

**Vicki** What? What is it?

**Roger** *stares at the telephone table in silence.*

*The bedroom door opens, and Flavia puts Roger's flight bag on the table outside without looking round. The door closes again.*

**Vicki** What's happening?

**Roger** The sardines. They've gone.

**Vicki** Perhaps there is something funny going on. I'm going to get into bed and put my head under the . . .

*She freezes at the sight of the flight bag.*

**Roger** I put them there. Or was it *there*?

**Vicki** Bag . . .

**Vicki** *runs down the stairs to Roger, who is directly underneath the gallery.*

**Roger** I suppose Mrs Sprockett must have taken them away again . . . What? What is it?

**Vicki** Bag!

**Roger** Bag?

**Vicki** Bag! Bag!

**Vicki** *drags Roger silently back towards the stairs.*

*Enter Flavia from the bedroom with the box of files. She picks up the flight bag as well and takes them both off along the upstairs corridor.*

**Roger** What do you mean, bag, bag?

**Vicki** Bag! Bag! Bag!

**Roger** What bag?

**Vicki** *sees the empty table outside the bedroom door.*

**Vicki** No bag!

**Roger** No bag?

**Vicki** Your bag! Suddenly! Here! Now – gone!

**Roger** It's in the bedroom. I put it in the bedroom.

*Exit Roger into the bedroom.*

**Vicki** Don't go in there!

*Enter **Roger** from the bedroom.*

**Roger** The box!

**Vicki** The box!

**Roger** They've both gone!

**Vicki** Oh! My files!

**Roger** What on earth's happening? Where's Mrs Spratchett?

*He starts downstairs. **Vicki** follows him.*

**Roger** You wait in the bedroom.

**Vicki** No! No! No!

*She runs downstairs.*

**Roger** At least put your dress on!

**Vicki** I'm not going in there!

**Roger** I'll fetch it for you, I'll fetch it for you!

*Exit **Roger** into the bedroom.*

**Vicki** Yes, quick – let's get out of here!

*Enter **Roger** from the bedroom.*

**Roger** Your dress has gone.

**Vicki** I'm never going to see Basingstoke again!

***Roger** goes downstairs.*

**Roger** Don't panic! Don't panic! There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this. I'll fetch Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening. You wait here . . . You can't stand here looking like that . . . Wait in the study . . . Study, study, study!

*Exit **Roger** into the service quarters.*

***Vicki** opens the study door. There's a roar of exasperation from **Philip**, off. She turns and flees.*

**Vicki** Roger! There's a strange figure in there! Where are you?

*There is another cry from Philip, off.*

*Exit Vicki blindly through the front door, which closes behind her.*

*Enter Philip from the study. He is holding the tax demand in his right hand and one of the plates of sardines in his left.*

**Philip** Darling, I know this is going to sound silly, but . . .

*He struggles to get the tax demand unstuck from his fingers, encumbered by the plate of sardines.*

*Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor, carrying various pieces of bric-a-brac.*

**Flavia** Darling, if we're not going to bed I'm going to clear out the attic.

**Philip** I can't come to bed! I'm glued to a tax demand! **Flavia** Darling, why don't you put the sardines down?

*Philip puts the plate of sardines down on the table. But when he takes his hand away the sardines come with it.*

**Philip** Darling, I'm stuck to the sardines!

**Flavia** Darling, don't play the fool. Get that bottle marked poison in the downstairs loo. That eats through anything.

*Exit Flavia along the upstairs corridor.*

**Philip** (*flapping the tax demand*) I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, but this is ridiculous.

*Exit Philip into the downstairs bathroom.*

*Pause.*

**Lloyd** Selsdon . . . ? You're on, Selsdon. We're there. The moment's arrived . . .

**Belinda** (*off*) It's all right, love. He's coming, he's coming . . .

**Lloyd** But his arm should be coming through that window even

before Freddie's off!

*A pane of glass shatters in the mullion window and an arm comes through and releases the catch.*

**Lloyd** Ah. And here it is.

*The window opens and through it appears an elderly **Burglar**. He has great character, but is in need of extensive repair and modernisation.*

**Burglar** No bars, no burglar alarm. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

*He climbs in.*

**Lloyd** All right, Selsdon, hold it. Let's take it again.

**Burglar** No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep. When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do bullion vaults!

**Lloyd** Hold it, Selsdon. Hold it!

**Burglar** What am I doing now?

**Lloyd** *Hold it!*

*Enter **Poppy** from the wings.*

**Burglar** I'm breaking into paper bags!

**Poppy** Lloyd wants you to hold it.

*Enter **Belinda**.*

**Burglar** Right, what are they offering . . . ?

**Belinda** Stop, Selsdon, my love! Wait, my precious!

**Selsdon** *stops, restrained at last by **Belinda**'s hand on his arm.*

**Lloyd** It's like Myra Hess playing on through the air raids.

**Selsdon** Stop?

**Poppy** Stop.

**Belinda** Stop.

**Lloyd** Thank you, Belinda. Thank you, Poppy.

*Exeunt **Belinda** and **Poppy**.*

**Lloyd** Selsdon . . .

**Selsdon** I met Myra Hess once.

**Lloyd** I think he can hear better than I can.

**Selsdon** I beg your pardon?

**Lloyd** From your entrance, please, Selsdon.

**Selsdon** Well, it was during the war, at a charity show in Sunderland . . .

**Lloyd** Thank you! Poppy!

**Selsdon** Oh, not for me. It stops me sleeping.

*Enter **Poppy** from the wings.*

**Lloyd** Put the glass back once more.

**Selsdon** Come on again?

**Lloyd** Right. Only, Selsdon . . .

**Selsdon** Yes?

**Lloyd** A little sooner, Selsdon. A shade earlier. A touch closer to yesterday. All right? Freddie!

*Enter **Frederick**.*

**Lloyd** (*to Selsdon*) Start moving as soon as Freddie opens the door. (*To Frederick.*) What's the line? **Frederick** 'I've heard of people getting *stuck* with a problem, but this is ridiculous.'

**Lloyd** Start moving as soon as you hear the line, 'I've heard of people getting stuck with a *problem* . . .'

**Frederick** 'Stuck with a *problem*'?

**Lloyd** 'Stuck with a *problem*, but this is ridiculous.' And I want your arm through that window. Right?

**Selsdon** Say no more. May I make a suggestion, though? Should I perhaps come on a little earlier?

**Lloyd** Selsdon . . .

**Selsdon** Only there does seem to be something of a hiatus between Freddie's exit and my entrance.

**Lloyd** No, Selsdon. Listen. Don't worry. I've got it.

**Selsdon** Yes?

**Lloyd** How about coming on a little earlier?

**Selsdon** We're obviously thinking along the same lines.

*Exit Selsdon through the window.*

**Lloyd** Am I putting him on or is he putting me on? Right, Freddie, from your exit.

**Philip** (*flapping the tax demand*) I've heard of people getting stuck with a *problem*, but this is ridiculous.

*Exit Philip into downstairs bathroom.*

*Enter Burglar as before, but on time.*

**Burglar** No bars, no burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

*He climbs in.*

No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep. When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do bullion vaults! What am I doing now? I'm breaking into paper bags!

*He opens the front door.*

So what are they offering? (*He peers at the television.*) One microwave oven.

*He unplugs it and puts it on the sofa.*

What? Fifty quid? Hardly worth lifting it.

*He inspects the paintings and ornaments.*

Junk . . . Junk . . . If you insist . . .

*He pockets some small item.*

Where's his desk? No, they all say the same thing . . . They all say the same thing . . .

**Selsdon** Yes? Line?

**Poppy** (*off*) 'It's hard to adjust to retirement.'

**Selsdon** What?

**Lloyd** (*wearily*) 'It's hard to adjust to retirement.'

**Seldon** Hard to what?

**Others** (*variously, off*) 'Adjust to retirement.'

**Selsdon** It's also very hard to hear if everyone talks at once.

*Exit **Burglar** into the study.*

*Enter **Roger** from the service quarters, followed by **Mrs Clackett**, who is holding another plate of sardines.*

**Roger** . . . And the prospective tenant naturally wishes to know if there is any previous history of paranormal phenomena.

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, yes, dear, it's all nice and paranormal.

**Roger** I mean, has anything ever dematerialised before? Has anything ever . . . ?

*He sees the television set on the sofa.*

. . . flown about?

**Mrs Clackett** *puts the sardines down on the telephone table, moves the television set back and closes the front door.*

**Mrs Clackett** Flown about? No, the things move themselves on their own two feet, just like they do in any house.

**Roger** I'd better warn the prospective tenant. She is inspecting the study.

*He opens the study door and then closes it again.*

There's a man in there!

**Mrs Clackett** No, no, there's no one in the house, love.

**Roger** *(opening the study door)* Look! Look! He's . . . *searching for something.*

**Mrs Clackett** *(glancing briefly)* I can't see no one.

**Roger** You can't see him? But this is extraordinary! And where is my prospective tenant? I left her in there! She's gone! My prospective tenant has disappeared!

*He closes the study door and looks round the living-room. He sees the sardines on the telephone table.*

Oh my God.

**Mrs Clackett** Now what?

**Roger** There!

**Mrs Clackett** Where?

**Roger** The sardines!

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, the sardines.

**Roger** You can see the sardines?

**Mrs Clackett** I can see the sardines.

**Roger** *touches them cautiously, then picks up the plate.*

**Mrs Clackett** I can see the way they're going, too.

**Roger** I'm not letting these sardines out of my hand. But where is my prospective tenant?

*He goes upstairs, holding the sardines.*

**Mrs Clackett** I'm going to be opening sardines all night, in and out of here like a cuckoo on a clock.

*Exit Mrs Clackett into the service quarters.*

**Roger** Vicki! Vicki!

*Exit Roger into the bedroom.*

*Enter Burglar from the study, carrying an armful of silver cups, etc.*

**Burglar** No, I miss the violence. I miss having other human beings around to terrify . . .

*He dumps the silverware on the sofa and exits into the study.*

*Enter Roger from mezzanine bathroom.*

**Roger** Where's she gone? Vicki?

*Exit Roger into the linen cupboard.*

*Enter Burglar from the study, carrying Philip's box and bag. He empties the contents of the box out behind the sofa, and loads the silverware into the box.*

**Burglar** It's nice to hear a bit of shouting and screaming around you. All this silence gets you down . . .

*Enter Roger from the linen cupboard, still holding the sardines.*

**Roger** (calls) Vicki! Vicki!

*Exit Roger into the bedroom.*

**Burglar** I'm going to end up talking to myself . . .

*Exit the Burglar into study, unaware of Roger.*

*Enter Philip from the downstairs bathroom. His right hand is still*

*stuck to the tax demand, his left to the plate of sardines.*

**Philip** Darling, this stuff that eats through anything. It eats through *trousers*!

*He examines holes burnt in the front of them.*

Darling, if it eats through trousers, you don't think it goes on and eats through . . . Listen, darling, I think I'd better get these trousers off! (*He begins to do so, as best he can.*) Darling, quick, this is an emergency! I mean, if it eats through absolutely anything . . . Darling, I think I can feel it! I think it's eating through . . . absolutely everything!

*Enter Roger from the bedroom, still holding the sardines.*

**Roger** There's something evil in this house.

**Philip** *pulls up his trousers.*

**Philip** (*aside*) The Inland Revenue!

**Roger** (*sees Philip, frightened*) He's back!

**Philip** No!

**Roger** No?

**Philip** I'm not here.

**Roger** He's not there!

**Philip** I'm abroad.

**Roger** He's walking abroad.

**Philip** I must go.

**Roger** Stay!

**Philip** I won't, thank you.

**Roger** Speak!

**Philip** Only in the presence of my lawyer.

**Roger** Only in the presence of your . . . ? Hold on. You're not

from the other world!

**Philip** Yes, yes – Marbella!

**Roger** You're some kind of intruder!

**Philip** Well, nice to meet you.

*He waves goodbye with his right hand, then sees the tax demand on it and hurriedly puts it away behind his back.*

I mean, have a sardine.

*He offers the sardines on his left hand. His trousers, unsupported, fall down.*

**Roger** No, you're not! You're some kind of sex maniac! You've done something to Vicki! I'm going to come straight downstairs . . . !

*Roger comes downstairs and dials 999.*

**Philip** Oh, you've got some sardines. Well, if there's nothing I can offer you . . .

**Roger** This is plainly a matter for the police! (*Into the phone.*) Police!

**Philip** . . . I think I'll be running along.

*He runs, his trousers still round his ankles, out through the front door.*

**Roger** Come back . . . ! (*Into the phone.*) Hello – police? Someone has broken into my house! Or rather someone has broken into someone's house . . . No, but he's a sex maniac! I left a young woman here and what's happened to her no one knows!

*Enter Vicki through the window.*

**Vicki** There's a man lurking in the undergrowth!

**Roger** (*into the phone*) Sorry . . . the young woman has reappeared. (*Hand over phone.*) Are you all right?

**Vicki** No, he almost saw me!

**Roger** (*into the phone*) He almost saw her . . . Yes, but he's a burglar as well! He's taken our things!

**Vicki** (*finds Philip's bag and box*) The things are here.

**Roger** (*into the phone*) The things have come back. So we're just missing a plate of sardines.

**Vicki** (*finding the sardines left near the front door by Roger*) Here are the sardines.

**Roger** (*into the phone*) And we've found the sardines.

**Vicki** This is the police? You want the police here? In my underwear?

**Roger** (*into the phone*) So what am I saying? I'm saying, let's say no more about it. (*He puts the phone down.*) I thought something terrible had happened to you!

**Vicki** It has! I know him!

**Roger** You know him?

**Vicki** He's dealt with by our office!

**Roger** He's just an ordinary sex maniac.

**Vicki** Yes, but he mustn't see me like this! You have to keep up certain standards if you work for Inland Revenue!

**Roger** Well, put something on!

**Vicki** I haven't got anything!

**Roger** There must be something in the bathroom!

*He picks up the box and bag, and leads the way.*

Bring the sardines!

*Exeunt Roger and Vicki into the downstairs bathroom.*

*Enter the Burglar from the study and dumps more booty.*

**Burglar** Right, that's downstairs tidied up a bit. (*He starts*

*upstairs.) Just give the upstairs a quick going-over for them.*

*Exit the **Burglar** into the mezzanine bathroom.*

*Enter **Vicki**, holding the sardines and a white bathmat, and **Roger**, carrying the box and bag, from the downstairs bathroom.*

**Vicki** A bathmat?

**Roger** Better than nothing!

**Vicki** I can't go around in front of our taxpayers wearing a bathmat!

**Roger** The bedroom, then! There must be something in the bedroom!

*He leads the way upstairs.*

**Vicki** No, no, no, no! I'm not going in that bedroom again!

**Roger** I'll look in the bedroom. You look in the other bathroom.

*Exit **Roger** into the bedroom and **Vicki** into the mezzanine bathroom.*

*Enter **Philip** through the front door.*

**Philip** Darling! Help! Where are you?

*Enter **Vicki** from the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Vicki** Roger! Roger!

*Exit **Philip** hurriedly, unseen by **Vicki**, into the downstairs bathroom.*

**Vicki** There's someone in the bathroom now!

***Vicki** runs towards the bedrooms, then stops.*

**Flavia** (off) Oh, darling, I'm finding such lovely things . . . !

***Vicki** turns and runs downstairs instead, as **Flavia** enters along the upstairs corridor, absorbed in the china tea service she is carrying.*

***Vicki** exits hurriedly into the downstairs bathroom.*

**Flavia** Do you remember this china tea service –

**Vicki** *screams, off.*

**Flavia** – that you gave me on the very first anniversary of our .  
.. ?

*Enter Vicki from the downstairs bathroom. She stops at the sight of Flavia.*

**Flavia** Who are you?

**Vicki** Oh, no – it's his wife and dependents! *(She puts her hands over her face.)*

*Enter Philip from the downstairs bathroom, still with his hands encumbered, holding the bathmat now as well, and keeping his trousers up with his elbows.*

**Philip** Excuse me, I think you've dropped your dress!

**Flavia** gasps. **Philip** looks up at the gallery and sees her.

**Philip** (to **Flavia**) Where have you been? I've been going mad! Look at the state I'm in!

*He holds up his hands to show Flavia the state he is in and his trousers fall down. The tea service slips from Flavia's horrified hands, and rains down on the floor of the living-room below. Philip hurries towards the stairs, trousers round his ankles, his hands extended in supplication.*

Darling, honestly!

**Vicki** flees before him, comes face to face with **Flavia**, and takes refuge in the linen cupboard.

**Philip** She just burst into the room and her dress fell off!

*Exit Flavia, with a cry of pain, along the upstairs corridor.*

*Enter Roger from the bedroom, directly in Philip's path. Philip holds up the bathmat in front of his face. He is invisible to Roger, though, because the latter is holding up a white bedsheet.*

**Roger** Here, put this sheet on for the moment while I see if

there's something in the attic.

**Roger** *leaves Philip with the sheet and exits along upstairs corridor.*

**Philip** *turns to go back downstairs.*

*Enter Burglar from the mezzanine bathroom, holding two gold taps.*

**Burglar** One pair gold taps . . . *(He stops at the sight of Philip.)*  
Oh, my Gawd!

**Philip** Who are you?

**Burglar** Me? Fixing the taps.

**Philip** Tax? Income tax?

**Burglar** That's right, governor. In come new taps . . . out go old taps.

*Exit Burglar into the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Philip** Tax-inspectors everywhere!

**Roger** *(off)* Here you are!

**Philip** The other one!

*Exit Philip into the bedroom, holding the bathmat in front of his face.*

*Enter Roger along the upstairs corridor holding Vicki's dress.*

**Roger** I've found your dress! It came flying out of the attic at me!

*Exit Roger into mezzanine bathroom.*

*Enter Philip from the bedroom, trying to pull the bathmat off his head.*

**Philip** Darling! I've got her dress stuck to my head now!

*Enter Roger from the mezzanine bathroom.*

*Exit Philip into the bedroom.*

**Roger** Another intruder!

*Enter the **Burglar** from the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Burglar** Just doing the taps, governor.

**Roger** Attacks? Not attacks on women?

**Burglar** Try anything, governor, but I'll do the taps on the bath first.

*Exit **Burglar** into the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Roger** Sex maniacs everywhere! Where is Vicki? Vicki . . . ?

*Exit **Roger** into the downstairs bathroom.*

*Enter **Burglar** from the mezzanine bathroom, heading for the front door.*

**Burglar** People everywhere! I'm off. A tax on women? I don't know, they'll put a tax on anything these days.

*Enter **Roger** from the downstairs bathroom. The **Burglar** stops.*

**Roger** If I can't find her, you're going to be in trouble, you see.

**Burglar** WC? I'll fix it.

*Exit **Burglar** into the mezzanine bathroom again.*

**Roger** Vicki . . . ?

*Exit **Roger** through the front door.*

*Enter **Philip** from the bedroom. The bathmat is still on his head, but is now arranged like a burnous, and he is wrapped in a white bedsheet.*

*Enter **Vicki** from the linen cupboard, enrobed from head to foot in a black bedsheet. They both quietly close the doors behind them.*

**Vicki** | **Roger**!  
**Philip** | **Darling**!

*They see each other and start back.*

*Enter **Roger** through the front door.*

**Roger** Sheikh! I thought you were coming at four? And this is your charming wife? So you want to see over the house now, do you, Sheikh? Right. Well. Since you're upstairs already . . .

**Roger** *goes upstairs.*

*Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor, carrying a vase.*

**Flavia** Him and his floozie! I'll break this over their heads!

**Roger** . . . let's start downstairs.

**Roger, Philip and Vicki** *go downstairs.*

**Flavia** Who are you? Who are these creatures?

**Roger** *(to Philip and Vicki)* I'm sorry about this. I don't know who she is. No connection with the house, I assure you.

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters, with another plate of sardines. Roger advances to introduce her.*

**Roger** Whereas this good lady with the sardines, on the other hand . . .

**Mrs Clackett** No other hands, thank you, not in my sardines, 'cause this time I'm eating them.

**Roger** . . . is fully occupied with her sardines, so perhaps the toilet facilities would be of more interest.

*He ushers Philip and Vicki away from Mrs Clackett towards the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Flavia** Mrs Clackett, who are these people?

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, we get them all the time, love. They're just Arab sheets.

**Roger** I'm sorry about this. *(He opens the door to the mezzanine bathroom.)* But in here . . .

**Flavia** Arab sheets?

*Exit Flavia into the bedroom.*

**Roger** In here we have . . .

*Enter the Burglar from the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Burglar** Ballcocks, governor. Your ballcocks have gone.

**Roger** We have him.

*Enter Flavia from the bedroom.*

**Flavia** They're *Irish* sheets! Irish linen sheets off my own bed!

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, the thieving devils!

**Roger** In the *study*, however . . .

**Mrs Clackett** You give me that sheet, you devil!

*She seizes the nearest sheet, and it comes away in her hand to reveal Vicki.*

Oh, and there she stands in her smalls, for all the world to see!

**Roger** It's you!

**Flavia** It's her!

**Flavia** *comes downstairs menacingly.*

*Exit Philip discreetly into the study.*

**Burglar** It's my little girl!

**Vicki** Dad!

**Flavia** *stops.*

*Enter Philip from the study in amazement. (He is now played by a double – Tim.)*

**Burglar** Our little Vicki, that ran away from home, I thought I'd never see again!

**Mrs Clackett** Well, would you believe it?

**Vicki (to Burglar)** What are you doing here like this?

**Burglar** What are *you* doing here like *that*?

**Vicki** Me? I'm taking our files on tax evasion to Inland Revenue in Basingstoke.

**Philip/Tim** Agh!

*He collapses behind the sofa, clutching at his heart, unnoticed by the others.*

**Flavia** (*threateningly*) So where's my other sheet?

*Enter through the front door the most sought-after of all properties on the market today – a **Sheikh**. He is wearing Arab robes and bears a strong resemblance to **Philip**, since he is also played by **Frederick**.*

**Sheikh** Ah! A house of heavenly peace! I rent it!

**Roger** Hold on, hold on . . . I know that face! (*Pulls the Sheikh's burnous aside to reveal his face.*) He isn't a sheikh! He's that sex-maniac!

**Flavia** Yes – it's my husband!

**Sheikh** What?

*They all fall upon him.*

*Frederick's trousers are revealed to be around his ankles.*

**Lloyd** Trousers!

**Mrs Clackett** You take all the clean sheets! (*She tries to pull the robes off him.*)

**Sheikh** What? What?

**Lloyd** Trousers! Trousers!

**Vicki** You snatch my bathmat! (*She tries to pull his burnous off him.*)

**Sheikh** What? What? What?

**Flavia** You toss me aside like a broken china doll! (*She hits him.*)

**Lloyd** And to cap it all you've got your trousers on!

*Everyone except Selsdon finally comes to a halt.*

**Burglar** And what you're up to with my little girl down there in Basingstoke . . .

*Even Selsdon becomes aware that the action has ceased.*

**Selsdon** Stop?

**Belinda** Stop, stop.

**Lloyd** *comes up on stage.*

**Lloyd** It's a question of authenticity, you see, Freddie. *Do Arab potentates wear trousers under their robes?* I don't know. Maybe they do. But not round their ankles, Freddie! Not round their ankles!

**Frederick** Sorry. It's just frightfully difficult doing a quick change without a dresser.

**Lloyd** Get Tim to help you. Tim! Where's Tim? Come on, Tim! Tim!

**Tim**, *wearing the sheet as Philip's double, gets to his feet and gazes blearily at Lloyd.*

**Tim** Sorry?

**Lloyd** Oh, yes. You're acting.

**Tim** I must have dropped off down there.

**Lloyd** Never mind, Tim.

**Tim** Do something?

**Lloyd** No, let it pass. We'll just struggle through on our own. Tim has a sleep behind the sofa, while all the rest of us run round with our trousers round our ankles. OK, Freddie? You'll just have to do

the best you can. On we go, then . . .

**Frederick** *hesitates.*

**Lloyd** Some other problem, Freddie?

**Frederick** Well, since we're stopped anyway.

**Lloyd** Why did I ask?

**Frederick** I mean, you know how stupid I am about plot.

**Lloyd** I know, Freddie.

**Frederick** May I ask another silly question?

**Lloyd** All my studies in world drama lie at your disposal.

**Frederick** I still don't understand why the Sheikh just happens to be Philip's double.

**Garry** Because he comes in and we all think he's, you know, and we all, I mean, that's the joke.

**Frederick** I see that.

**Belinda** My sweet, the rest of the plot depends on it!

**Frederick** I see that. But it *is* rather a coincidence, isn't it?

**Lloyd** It *is* rather a coincidence, Freddie, yes. Until you reflect that there was an earlier draft of the play, now unfortunately lost to us. And in this the author makes it clear that Philip's father as a young man had travelled extensively in the Middle East.

**Frederick** I see . . . I *see*!

**Lloyd** You see?

**Frederick** That's very interesting.

**Lloyd** I thought you'd like that.

**Frederick** But will the audience get it?

**Lloyd** You must tell them, Freddie. Looks. Gestures. That's what acting's all about. OK?

**Frederick** Yes. Thank you, Lloyd. Thank you.

**Lloyd** And it will be even more powerful when you do it with no trousers.

**Frederick** Of course. (*Takes his trousers off.*)

**Lloyd** Right, can we just finish the act? From Belinda's beautiful line, 'You toss me aside like a broken china doll!'

**Lloyd** *returns to the stalls.*

I'm being so clever out here! What's going to be left of this show when I've gone off to do *Richard III* and you're up there on your own? Right – 'You toss me aside like a broken china doll!'

**Flavia** You toss me aside like a broken china doll! (*She hits him.*)

**Sheikh** What? What? What?

**Burglar** And what you're up to with my little girl down there in Basingstoke I won't ask. But I'll tell you one thing, Vicki.

*Pause.*

**Lloyd** Brooke!

**Brooke** Sorry . . .

**Lloyd** Your line. Come on, love, we're two lines away from the end of the act.

**Brooke** I don't understand.

**Lloyd** Give her the line!

**Poppy** (*off*) 'What's that, Dad?'

**Brooke** Yes, but I don't understand.

**Belinda** It's 'What's that, Dad?'

**Selsdon** Yes, I say to you, 'I'll tell you one thing, Vicki' and you say to me, 'What's that, Dad?'

**Brooke** I don't understand why the Sheikh looks like Philip.

*Silence. Everyone waits for the storm. **Lloyd** comes slowly up on stage.*

**Lloyd** Poppy! Bring the book!

*Enter **Poppy** from the wings, with the book.*

**Lloyd** (*patiently*) Is that the line, Poppy? 'I don't understand why the Sheikh looks like Philip'? Can we consult the author's text and make absolutely sure?

**Poppy** Well, I think it's . . .

**Lloyd** (*with exquisite politeness*) 'What's that, Dad?' Right. That's the line, Brooke, love. We all know you've worked in very classy places up in London where they let you make the play up as you go along, but we don't want that kind of thing here, do we. Not when the author has provided us with such a considered and polished line of his own. Not at one o'clock in the morning. Not two lines away from the end of Act One. Not when we're just about to get a tea break before we all drop dead of exhaustion. We merely want to hear the line. (*Suddenly puts his mouth next to **Brooke's** ear and shouts.*) 'What's that, Dad?' (*All patience and politeness again.*) That's all. Nothing else. I'm not being unreasonable, am I?

**Brooke** *abruptly turns, runs upstairs and exits into the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Lloyd** Exit? Does it say 'exit'?

*The sound of **Brooke** weeping, off, and running downstairs.*

**Lloyd** Oh dear, now she's going to wash her lenses away.

*Exit **Lloyd** through the front door.*

**Frederick** (*chastened*) Oh, good Lord.

**Selsdon** (*likewise*) A little heavy with the sauce, I thought.

**Garry** I thought it was going to be Poppy when he finally, you know.

**Dotty** It's usually Poppy. Isn't it, love?

**Poppy** *smiles wanly.*

**Frederick** I suppose that was all my fault.

**Garry** But why pick on, you know?

**Dotty** Yes, why Brooke?

**Belinda** I thought it was quite sweet, actually.

**Garry** Sweet?

**Belinda** Trying to pretend they're not having a little thing together.

**Dotty** A little thing? Lloyd and Brooke . . . ?

**Belinda** Didn't you know?

**Selsdon** Brooke and Lloyd?

**Belinda** Where do you think they've been all weekend?

**Frederick** Good Lord. You mean, that's why he wasn't here when poor old Tim . . .

*He stops, conscious that **Tim** is behind the sofa.*

**Dotty** . . . put the set up back-to-front.

**Belinda** Sh! Here they come!

*Enter **Lloyd** with his arm round **Brooke**.*

**Lloyd** OK. All forgotten. I was irresistible.

**Poppy** I think I'm going to be sick.

*Exit **Poppy** into the wings.*

**Dotty** Oh, no!

**Lloyd** Oh, for heaven's sake!

*Exit **Lloyd** after **Poppy**.*

**Garry** You mean . . . ?

**Selsdon** Her, too?

**Frederick** Oh, great Scott!

**Belinda** Well, that's something I *didn't* know.

**Brooke** I think I'm going to faint.

**Dotty** Yes, sit down, love!

*They sit **Brooke** down.*

**Belinda** Quick – do your meditation.

**Selsdon** Well, that's something *she* didn't know!

**Belinda** Hush, love.

**Dotty** Two weeks' rehearsal, that's all we've had.

**Frederick** Whatever next?

**Selsdon** *Most* exciting!

**Belinda** (*indicating **Brooke***) Sh!

**Selsdon** Oh, yes. Sh!

**Dotty** Here he comes.

*Enter **Lloyd** from the wings, subdued.*

**Dotty** Is she all right, love?

**Lloyd** She'll be all right in a minute. Something she ate, probably.

**Garry** (*indicating **Brooke***) Yes, this one's feeling a bit, you know.

**Lloyd** I'm feeling a bit, you know, myself. I think I'm going to –

**Belinda** Which?

**Garry** (*offering a chair*) Faint?

**Belinda** (*offering a vase*) Or be sick?

**Lloyd** (*subsides on to the chair*) – need that tea break.

**Dotty** You're certainly overdoing it at the moment, love.

**Lloyd** So could we just have the last line of the act?

**Selsdon** Me? Last line? Right.

**Burglar** But I'll tell you one thing, Vicki.

**Vicki** (*with a murderous look at Lloyd*) What's that, Dad?

**Burglar** When all around is strife and uncertainty, there's nothing like a . . .

**Selsdon** . . . what?

**Poppy** (*off, tearful*) Oh . . . 'A good old-fashioned plate of sardines.'

**Selsdon** What did she say?

**Belinda** 'A good old-fashioned plate . . .'

*She hands him Mrs Clackett's plate.*

**Burglar** A good old-fashioned plate of . . .

**Selsdon** . . . what?

**Poppy** *runs on with the book, Lloyd jumps to his feet, Tim jumps up from behind the sofa.*

**Everyone except Selsdon** *Sardines!*

*Tableau, with raised sardines. The tableau continues.*

**Lloyd** And *curtain!*

**Poppy** (*realises, sobs*) Oh!

*She runs hurriedly into the wings.*

CURTAIN

## Act Two

*The living-room of the Brents' country home. Wednesday afternoon.*

*(Theatre Royal, Ashton-under-Lyne. Wednesday matinée, 13 February.)*

*But this time we are watching the action from behind; the whole set has been turned through 180 degrees. All the doors can be seen – there is no masking behind them. Two stairways lead up to the platform that gives access to the doors on the upper level. Some of the scene inside the living-room is visible through the full-length window. There are also two doors in the backstage fabric of the theatre: one giving access to the dressing-rooms, and the pass door into the auditorium. The usual backstage furnishings, including the prompt corner and props table, chairs for the actors, a fire-point with fire-buckets and fire-axe, etc.*

**Tim** *is walking anxiously up and down in his dinner jacket.*

**Poppy** *is speaking into the microphone in the prompt corner.*

**Poppy** *(over the tannoy)* Act One beginners, please. Your calls, Miss Otley, Miss Ashton, Mr Lejeune, Mr Fellowes, Miss Blair. Act One beginners, please.

**Tim** And maybe Act One beginners is what we'll get. What do you think?

**Poppy** *(to Tim)* Oh, Dotty'll pull herself together now we've called beginners. Now she knows she's got to be on stage in five minutes. Won't she?

**Tim** Will she?

**Poppy** You know what Dotty's like.

**Tim** We've only been on the road for a month! We've only got to Ashton-under-Lyne! What's it going to be like by the time we've got to Stockton-on-Tees?

**Poppy** If only she'd speak!

**Tim** If only she'd unlock her dressing-room door! Look, if Dotty won't go on . . .

**Poppy** Won't go on?

**Tim** If she won't.

**Poppy** She will.

**Tim** Of course she will.

**Poppy** Won't she?

**Tim** I'm sure she will. But if she *doesn't* . . .

**Poppy** She must!

**Tim** She will, she will. But if she *didn't* . . .

**Poppy** I'd have five minutes to change. Four minutes.

**Tim** If only she'd say something.

*The pass door opens cautiously, and **Lloyd** puts his head round. He closes it again at the sight of **Poppy**.*

**Poppy** I'll have another go. Takes your mind off your own problems, anyway.

*Exit **Poppy** in the direction of the dressing-rooms.*

***Lloyd** puts his head back round the door.*

**Lloyd** Has she gone?

**Tim** Lloyd! I didn't know you were coming today!

***Lloyd** comes in. He is carrying a bottle of whisky.*

**Lloyd** I wasn't. I haven't.

**Tim** Anyway, thank God you're here!

**Lloyd** I'm not. I'm in Aberystwyth. I'm in the middle of rehearsing *Richard III*.

**Tim** Dotty and Garry . . .

**Lloyd** I don't want anyone to know I'm in.

**Tim** No, but Dotty and Garry . . .

**Lloyd** I just want two hours alone and undisturbed with Brooke in her dressing-room between shows, then I'm on the 7.25 back to Wales. (*Gives Tim the whisky.*) This is for Brooke. Put it somewhere safe. Make sure Selsdon doesn't get his hands on it.

**Tim** Right. They've had some kind of row. . .

**Lloyd** Good, good. (*Takes money out of his wallet and gives it to Tim.*) There's a little flower shop across the road from the stage door. I want you to buy me some very large and expensive-looking flowers.

**Tim** Right. Now Dotty's locked herself in her dressing-room . . .

**Lloyd** Don't let Poppy see them. They're not for Poppy.

**Tim** No. And she won't speak to anyone . . .

**Lloyd** First house finishes just after five, yes? Second house starts at seven thirty?

**Tim** Lloyd, that's what I'm trying to tell you – there may not *be* a show!

**Lloyd** She hasn't walked out already?

**Tim** No one knows *what* she's doing! She's locked in her dressing-room! She won't speak to anyone!

**Lloyd** You've called beginners?

**Tim** Yes!

**Lloyd** I can't play a complete love scene from cold in five minutes. It's not dramatically possible.

**Tim** She's had bust-ups with Garry before, of course.

**Lloyd** Brooke's had a bust-up with Garry?

**Tim** Brooke? Not Brooke – Dotty!

**Lloyd** Oh, Dotty.

**Tim** I mean, they had the famous bust-up the week before last, when we were playing Worksop.

**Lloyd** Right, right, you told me on the phone.

**Tim** She went out with this journalist bloke . . .

**Lloyd** Journalist – yes, yes . . .

**Tim** But you know Garry threatened to kill him?

**Lloyd** Killed him, yes, I know. Listen, don't worry about Dotty – she's got money in the show.

**Tim** Yes, but now it's happened again! Two o'clock this morning I'm woken up by this great banging on my door. It's Garry. Do I know where Dotty is? She hasn't come home.

**Lloyd** Tim, let me tell you something about *my* life. I have the Duke of Buckingham on the phone to me for an hour after rehearsal every evening complaining that the Duke of Gloucester is sucking boiled sweets through his speeches. The Duke of Clarence is off for the entire week doing a commercial for Madeira. Richard himself – would you believe? – Richard III? (*He demonstrates.*) – has now gone down with a back problem. I keep getting messages from Brooke about how unhappy she is here and now she's got herself a doctor's certificate for nervous exhaustion – she's going to walk! I have no time to find or rehearse another Vicki. I have just one afternoon, while Richard is fitted for a surgical corset, to cure Brooke of nervous exhaustion, with no medical aids except a little whisky – you've got the whisky? – a few flowers – you've got the money for the flowers? – and a certain faded charm. So I haven't come to the theatre to hear about other people's problems. I've come to be taken out of myself and preferably not put back again.

**Tim** Yes, but Lloyd . . .

**Lloyd** Have you done the front-of-house calls?

**Tim** Oh, the front-of-house calls!

**Tim** *hurries to the microphone in the prompt corner, still holding the money and whisky.*

**Lloyd** And don't let Poppy see those flowers!

*Exit Lloyd through the pass door.*

**Tim** *(into microphone)* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in three minutes.

*Enter Poppy from the dressing-rooms.*

**Poppy** We're going to be so late up!

**Tim** No luck?

**Poppy** Belinda's having a go. I haven't even started the front-of-house calls yet . . . Money? What's this for?

**Tim** Nothing, nothing! *(He puts the money behind his back and automatically produces the whisky with the other hand.)*

**Poppy** Whisky!

**Tim** Oh . . . is it?

**Poppy** Where did you find that?

**Tim** Well . . .

**Poppy** Up here? You mean Selsdon's hiding them round the stage now? *(She takes the whisky.)*

**Tim** Oh . . .

**Poppy** I'll put it in the ladies' loo. At least he won't go in there.

*Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms.*

**Poppy** No?

**Belinda** You know what Dotty's like when she's like this. Freddie's trying now . . . *(She sees the whisky.)* Oh, no!

**Poppy** He's hiding them round the stage now.

*Enter Frederick from the dressing-rooms.*

**Poppy** No?

**Frederick** No.

**Belinda** You didn't try for very long, my precious!

**Frederick** No, well . . . (*He sees the whisky.*) Oh dear.

**Belinda** He's hiding them on stage now.

*Exit Poppy to the dressing-rooms, holding the whisky.*

**Frederick** No, Garry came rushing out of his dressing-room in a great state. I couldn't quite understand what he was saying. I often feel with Garry that I must have missed something somewhere. You know how stupid I am about that kind of thing. But I think he was saying he wanted to kill me.

**Belinda** Oh, my poor sweet!

**Frederick** I thought I'd better leave him to it. I don't want to make things worse. He's all right, is he?

**Belinda** Who, Garry? Anything but, by the sound of it!

**Frederick** I mean, he's going on?

**Tim** Garry? *Garry's* going on. Of course he's going on. What's all this about *Garry* not going on?

**Belinda** Yes, because if you have to go on for Garry, Poppy can't go on for Dotty, because if Poppy goes on for Dotty, you'll have to be on the book!

**Tim** This is getting farcical.

**Belinda** Money.

**Tim** Money?

**Belinda** You're waving money around.

**Tim** Oh, that's for . . . Oh . . . !

**Tim** *hurriedly grabs his raincoat from a peg and exits into the dressing-rooms.*

**Frederick** She's a funny woman, you know – Dotty. So up and down. She was perfectly all right last night.

**Belinda** Last night?

**Frederick** Yes, she took me for a drink after the show in some club she knows about.

**Belinda** She was with *you*? You were with *her*?

**Frederick** She was being very sympathetic about all my troubles.

**Belinda** She's not going to sink her teeth into you! I won't let her!

**Frederick** No, no, she couldn't have been nicer. In fact, she came back to my digs afterwards for a cup of tea and she told me all *her* troubles. Sat there until three o'clock this morning. I don't know *what* the landlady thought!

*Enter Poppy.*

**Poppy** And another thing.

**Belinda** Nothing else, my sweet!

**Poppy** Where's Selsdon?

**Belinda** It turns out that it's Freddie here who's the cause of all the . . . Selsdon?

**Poppy** He's not in his dressing-room.

**Belinda** Oh – I might have guessed!

**Poppy** Oh – the front-of-house calls!

**Belinda** You do the calls. I'll took for Selsdon.

**Frederick** What shall I do?

**Belinda** (*firmly*) Absolutely nothing at all.

**Frederick** Right.

**Belinda** You've done quite enough already, my pet.

*Exit Belinda to the dressing-rooms.*

**Poppy** (*into the microphone*) Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in three minutes.

*Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms in his raincoat, carrying a large bunch of flowers.*

**Tim** He wants to kill someone. (*He takes off his raincoat.*)

**Poppy** *Selsdon* wants to kill someone?

**Tim** Garry, Garry. . . *Selsdon*?

**Poppy** We've lost him.

**Tim** Oh, not again!

**Poppy** Flowers!

**Tim** (*embarrassed*) Oh . . . Well . . . They're just . . . You know . . .

**Poppy** (*taking them*) Oh, Tim that's really sweet of you!

**Tim** Oh . . . Well . . .

**Poppy** (*to Frederick*) Isn't that sweet of him?

**Frederick** Very charming.

*She kisses Tim.*

**Poppy** I'll just look in the pub. (*She gives the flowers to Frederick.*) Hold these.

*Exit Poppy to the dressing-rooms.*

**Tim** I'll take those. (*He takes the flowers.*) Oh, the front-of-house calls! Hold these. (*He gives the flowers back to Frederick.*)

**Frederick** Oh, I think Poppy's done them.

**Tim** She gave them two minutes, did she? I'll give them one minute. (*Into the microphone.*) Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in one minute.

*He takes the flowers from Frederick.*

**Frederick** Oh dear, I think she said three minutes.

**Tim** *Three minutes? I said three minutes! She said three minutes?*

**Frederick** I think so.

**Tim** Hold these. *(He gives Frederick the flowers. Into the microphone.)* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in two minutes.

*Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms, holding the bottle of whisky.*

**Frederick** Any luck?

**Belinda** No, but I found yet another bottle.

**Frederick** Oh dear.

**Tim** Oh . . .

**Belinda** Hidden in the ladies' lavatory, would you believe.

**Frederick** Oh, my Lord!

**Tim** *(takes it)* Oxfam! I'll give it to Oxfam!

**Poppy** *runs in from the dressing-rooms.*

**Poppy** He's not in the pub . . .

**Belinda** *(indicates the whisky to Poppy)* No, he's hanging round ladies' lavatories.

**Tim** I'd better get the spare gear on.

*Exit Tim to the dressing-rooms with the whisky.*

**Poppy** *(into the microphone)* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in two minutes.

**Frederick** Oh dear – Tim's already told them two minutes.

**Poppy** He's done two minutes? *(Into the microphone.)* Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The curtain will rise in one minute.

*Enter Lloyd through the pass door.*

**Lloyd** What the fuck is going on?

**Belinda** Lloyd!

**Frederick** Great Scott!

**Poppy** I didn't know you were here!

**Lloyd** I'm not here! I'm at the Aberystwyth Festival! But I can't sit out there and listen to 'two minutes . . . three minutes . . . one minute . . . two minutes'!

**Belinda** My sweet, we're having great dramas downstairs!

**Lloyd** We're having great dramas out there! (*To Poppy.*) This is the matinée, honey! There's old-age pensioners out there! 'The curtain will rise in three minutes' – we all start for the Gents. 'The curtain will rise in one minute' – we all come running out again. We don't know which way we're going!

**Poppy** Lloyd, I've got to have a talk to you.

**Lloyd** (*kissing her*) Of course, honey, of course. Looking forward to it.

**Poppy** You got my message?

**Lloyd** Many, many messages.

**Poppy** Why didn't you answer?

**Lloyd** I did! I have! I'm here!

**Poppy** Lloyd, there's something I've got to tell you.

**Lloyd** Go on, then.

**Poppy** Well . . . (*She hesitates, embarrassed because other people can hear, then tries to keep her voice down.*) I went to the doctor today. . .

*Enter Brooke from the dressing-rooms, with the whisky.*

**Belinda** Brooke!

**Lloyd** *hastily abandons Poppy.*

**Lloyd** (*to Poppy*) Later, later. All right?

**Brooke** *holds up the whisky.*

**Belinda** Oh, no! Not another one!

**Brooke** In my dressing-room!

**Belinda** *(she takes the whisky)* In your *dressing-room?* *(To Lloyd.)*  
It's getting completely out of control!

**Frederick** *(taking the whisky)* I'll give it to Oxfam, with the other one.

**Lloyd** *(holds out his hand for the whisky)* I'll do it. Thank you.

**Brooke** *(sees him)* Lloyd! *(Peers.)* Lloyd?

**Lloyd** Got it in one. *(Kisses her.)*

**Brooke** You got my message?

**Lloyd** And came running, honey, and came running.

**Brooke** Lloyd, we've got to have a talk.

**Lloyd** We're *going* to have a talk, my love.

**Brooke** When?

**Lloyd** Later, yes? Later.

*He goes to take the whisky from Frederick, but is distracted by seeing the flowers that Frederick is holding.*

Flowers?

**Frederick** Oh, yes, sorry. *(He gives the flowers to Poppy.)*

**Poppy** Tim bought them for me. *(She puts them on her desk in the prompt corner.)*

**Lloyd** *Tim?* Bought them for *you?*

**Poppy** To cheer me up. *(Anxiously.)* Lloyd . . .

**Lloyd** Nothing more, just for the moment. Thank you. *(To Frederick.)* Strangle Tim for me when you see him, will you?

**Frederick** Right.

**Lloyd** *goes towards the pass door.*

**Belinda** But what about Dotty?

**Lloyd** I don't want to hear about Dotty.

**Frederick** And Garry?

**Lloyd** Not about Garry, either.

**Belinda** What about Selsdon?

**Lloyd** Listen, I think this show is beyond the help of a director. You just do it. I'll sit out there in the dark with a bag of toffees and enjoy it. OK? 'One minute' was the last call, if your memory goes back that far.

**Brooke** Lloyd!

**Poppy** Wait!

**Lloyd** *exits through the pass door. Poppy and Brooke jostle to follow him.*

**Brooke** (to Poppy) Excuse me!

**Poppy** I've got to talk to him!

**Frederick** (separating them) Girls, girls!

**Brooke** (indicates the dressing-rooms) I've a good mind to put my coat on and walk out of that door right here and now.

**Frederick** Listen, if you don't feel up to performing I'm sure Poppy would always be happy to have a bash on your behalf.

**Brooke** I beg your pardon?

**Poppy** Honestly!

**Belinda** (firmly) Brooke, you sit down and do your meditation. Poppy, you go and see what's happening with Dotty and Garry.

**Brooke** *reluctantly sits down on the floor. Exit Poppy to the dressing-*

*rooms.*

**Belinda** Freddie, my sweet precious . . .

**Frederick** Did I say something wrong?

*Enter Selsdon hurriedly through the pass door.*

**Selsdon** Where's Tim?

**Belinda** Selsdon! My sweet! Where have you been?

**Frederick** Are you all right? (*He puts out a sympathetic hand, then realises that it contains the whisky bottle.*) Oh dear. (*He hurriedly puts it out of sight behind his back.*)

**Belinda** We've been looking for you everywhere!

**Selsdon** Oh, yes, everywhere. In front – manager's office – bar. Not a sign of him.

**Belinda** He's looking for you in the dressing-rooms.

**Selsdon** That's right! Great shindig been going on down there. I thought Tim ought to know about it.

**Belinda** My love, I think he's heard.

**Selsdon** Oh, everything! Oh, he really went for her! 'I know when you've got your eye on someone!'

**Frederick** Oh dear, Dotty's got her eye on someone, has she?

**Selsdon** 'I've seen you creeping off into corners with that poor halfwit.'

**Frederick** Which poor halfwit?

**Belinda** Never mind, my love.

**Frederick** Not *Tim*?

**Belinda** No, no, no.

**Frederick** But who else is there? Apart from me?

*Enter Poppy from the dressing-rooms.*

**Poppy** I think they're coming.

**Belinda** They're coming!

**Frederick** They're coming!

**Selsdon** I knew they wouldn't.

**Poppy** And you're *here*!

**Selsdon** Oh, yes, every word!

**Poppy** Right. (*Into the microphone.*) Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats. The performance is about to begin.

*Enter Tim from the dressing-rooms, in Burglar's costume.*

**Tim** They're coming.

**Belinda** And we've found Selsdon.

**Tim** (*to Selsdon*) How did *you* get here?

**Selsdon** How? Through the wall!

**Tim** (*into the microphone*) Ladies and gentlemen, will you please take your seats.

**Poppy** I've done it!

**Tim** (*into the microphone*) The performance is about to . . .

**Poppy** I've done it, I've done it!

**Tim** (*to Poppy*) Done it? Done 'about to begin'?

**Poppy** Yes! About to begin, about to begin!

**Tim** (*into the microphone*) is about to . . . is about to begin *at any moment*.

**Belinda** Poor Lloyd! He'll choke on his toffees.

**Selsdon** No, the walls are very thin, you see. 'I'm absolutely sick to death of it,' she cries . . . (*Takes in what Tim is wearing.*) Am I setting a bit of a trend?

**Tim** (*realises*) Oh. . .

**Belinda** (*quickly, snatching Tim's Burglar cap off*) Understudy rehearsal, my love.

**Selsdon** Oh, for Garry, yes – very timely. 'You try to give some poor devil a leg up,' she says.

*Enter Garry from the dressing-rooms.*

**Belinda** Garry, my sweet!

**Selsdon** Or she may have said, 'a leg over. . .' Oh, and here he is.

**Frederick** (*to Garry*) Are you all right?

*Frederick collects the box and the flight bag from the props table and smilingly offers them to Garry, who snatches them angrily.*

**Selsdon** What does he say?

**Belinda** He's not saying anything, Selsdon, my sweet.

**Selsdon** Very sensible. Only stir it up again. 'I've seen you giving him little nods and smiles!' – that's what he kept saying.

*Enter Dotty from the dressing-rooms.*

**Belinda** Dotty, my love!

**Selsdon** Oh, she's emerged, has she? Come on, old girl! You're on!

**Frederick** Are you all right?

**Selsdon** Is she all right?

*Dotty merely sighs and smiles, and gives a little squeeze of the arm to Belinda. She takes up her place by the service quarters entrance, a tragically misunderstood woman. Garry moves pointedly away.*

**Belinda** (*to Selsdon*) She's fine.

**Tim** All right, everyone?

**Selsdon** 'Little hugs and squeezes.'

**Belinda** Hush, love.

**Poppy** Curtain up?

*Everyone looks anxiously from **Dotty** to **Garry** and back again. **Dotty** and **Garry** both ignore the looks. They stand aloof, then both at the same moment turn to check their appearance in the little mirrors fixed to the back of the set.*

**Frederick** Look, Dotty . . . Look, Garry . . . I'm not going to make a great speech, but we *have* all got to go out there and put on a performance, and well . . .

**Belinda** We can't do it in silence, my loves! We're going to have to speak to each other!

*Pause. Neither **Garry** nor **Dotty** has apparently heard.*

**Dotty** (*suddenly, bravely, to **Tim***) What's the house like?

**Belinda** That's the spirit!

**Frederick** Well done, Dotty!

**Tim** It's quite good. Well, for a matinée.

**Poppy** There's quite a crowd at the front of the back stalls.

**Selsdon** (*to **Poppy***) Come on, girl, get the tabs up! Some of those OAPs out there haven't got long to go.

**Poppy** Right. Quiet, then, please . . .

**Frederick** Let me just say one more word . . . Hold it a moment, Poppy . . .

**Selsdon** Let *me* just say one word. Sardines!

**Belinda** Sardines!

**Frederick** Sardines!

**Belinda** *rushes to the prop table to fetch **Dotty** the plate of sardines that she takes on for her first entrance.*

**Poppy** (*over tannoy*) Standing by, please. Music cue one . . .

*Enter **Lloyd** through the pass door.*

**Lloyd** Now what?

**Tim** We're just going up.

**Lloyd** We've been sitting there for an hour! They've gone quiet! They think someone's died!

**Frederick** I'm sorry, Lloyd. It's my fault. I was just saying a few words to everyone.

**Lloyd** Freddie, have you ever thought of having a brain transplant?

**Frederick** Sorry, sorry. Wrong moment. I see that.

**Lloyd** Anybody else have thoughts they feel they must communicate?

**Poppy** Well, not now, of course, but . . .

**Lloyd** *What?*

**Poppy** I mean, you know, later . . .

**Lloyd** *(to Tim, quietly, conscious that Brooke has stopped meditating and started watching)* And you bought these flowers for Poppy?

**Tim** No . . . *(Conscious that Poppy is watching.)* Well . . . yes . . .

**Lloyd** And you didn't buy any flowers for *me*?

**Tim** No . . . well . . . no . . .

**Lloyd** Tim, have you ever heard of such a thing as jealous rage?

**Tim** Yes . . . well . . . yes . . .

**Lloyd** Then take ten pounds of your own money, Tim, and go out to the florists and buy some flowers for *me*!

**Tim** Lloyd, we're just going up! I've got to run the show!

**Lloyd** Never mind the show. Concentrate on the floral arrangements. Bought them for Poppy! You two could have Freddie's old brain. You could have half each.

Exit **Lloyd** through the pass door. **Poppy** sobs.

**Frederick** Oh dear.

**Belinda** Don't cry, Poppy, love

**Selsdon** Just get the old bus on the road.

**Poppy** (over tannoy, tearfully) Standing by, please. Elecs stand by.

**Garry** (to himself) Christ! (He hammers his fist against the back of the set in frustration.)

**Poppy** Quiet backstage!

She waits for **Garry** to subside, then gives an involuntary noisy sob herself.

**Belinda** Hush, love.

**Poppy** (over tannoy, tearfully) Music cue one go.

*The introductory music for Nothing On.*

Tab's going up . . .

[Note: the act that follows is a somewhat condensed version of the one we saw rehearsed.]

*As the curtain rises the telephone is ringing.*

**Dotty** makes her entrance.——

—— *Enter from the service quarters*

**Mrs Clackett**, carrying a plate of sardines.

**Mrs Clackett** It's no good you going on . . .

*There is a sound of scattered applause.* —————

—— *She pauses a beat to acknowledge the applause.*

I can't open sardines and answer the phone. I've only got one pair of feet.

~~A small laugh. She drops the sardines down on the telephone table by the sofa and~~  
~~**Selsdon**, **Belinda** and **Frederick** express silent relief that the show~~  
~~hasn't last Yes, but to all their problems above. They Mr. Seldent's not~~  
~~her back. He dies here, yes, but he don't live here now because he~~

It was in Spain raincoat Philip Brent, his av's light checks This moon and  
writes to the play sing at's him, only now he writes them in Spain . . .  
Belinda's in Spain, too, he luthers all in Garry is hanging his head softly.  
Again in Spain? No, I'm not in Spain, dear. I look after the house for  
Frederick I push him his hand and look his head and give, only you've got a  
Garry Belinda dresses up, he's in the house with the clerical gives Garry's al  
what is literally, on the tielly, the, and by the way, puts his finger the  
happles, then remind him to be quiet.

Belinda chertiesthursespoken Frederick off. Frederick cannot  
understand it, it's too hard to do, the house, the house, the house, the house,  
the did by Garry's, Garry's use, they're in the house . . .

Squire, Squire, Squire, Squire, Squire, Squire, Squire, Squire, Squire, Squire,  
Hackham and, hold on, I'll go and look.

*She replaces the receiver.*

Frederick takes shelter behind Always the same, isn't it. Soon as  
Brooke, who is now waiting for her you take the weight off your feet,  
entrance. Garry chases him round down it all comes on your head.  
and round her.

Frederick hurriedly puts his Exit Mrs Clackett into the study,  
handkerchief to his nose. still holding the newspaper.

Belinda urges Garry to the back front door for his entrance.

—The front door opens. On the doorstep stands Roger, holding a  
cardboard box.

**Roger** . . . I have a housekeeper,  
yes, but this is her afternoon off.

Brooke makes her entrance. — Enter Vicki through the front  
door.

Frederick looks in his handkerchief Roger So we've got the place  
and comes over faint. Dotty has to entirely to ourselves.  
put her arm round him to help him  
to a chair.

As Garry turns back — to — Roger goes back and brings in  
collect the flight bag he gets a a flight bag, and closes the front  
fleeting glimpse of this. door.

All Garry's back through the service  
quarters. He speaks and then looks service quarters. Vicki gazes round.

**Roger** Hello? Anyone at home?

He stops on Frederick's foot and  
No, there's no one here. So what do you think?

Frederick struggles with damaged  
Roger and the dining room. Dotty really.

down on her knees to examine the foot.

~~Garry~~ ~~He opens the various doors, trying to determine what Dotty and Frederick have up to.~~ And a self-contained service flat for the Belinda makes things worse by trying to move Dotty's head to a less Vigetiv Position. And which one's the . . . ?

Roger What?

Vicki You know . . .

Roger The usual offices?

Through here.

~~Garry~~ ~~He opens the downstairs bathroom door for her.~~

~~Nickie~~ ~~a~~ ~~Fred~~ ~~trick~~ and Dotty.

Belinda pushes him back on stage.

Belinda just manages to detach

Exit Vicki into the bathroom.—

Dotty from her ministrations and get her back on stage for her entrance.—

Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, without the newspaper.

Mrs Clackett Now I've lost the sardines. . .

~~Belinda~~ ~~surprise~~ ~~Roger~~ ~~loses~~ ~~Frederick~~ ~~that~~ ~~Dotty~~ ~~has~~ ~~taken~~ ~~slips~~ ~~the~~ ~~chimpanzee~~ ~~Frederick~~ ~~can't~~ ~~understand~~ ~~a~~ ~~word~~ ~~of~~ ~~it~~.

~~Belinda~~ ~~has~~ ~~sorbyed~~ ~~it~~ ~~by~~ ~~fighting~~ ~~him~~ ~~Brooke~~ ~~one~~ ~~here~~.

Mrs Clackett I'm not here. I'm off, only it's the royal you know, where they wear those hats, and they're all covered in fruit, and who are you?

~~Roger~~ ~~sh~~ ~~the~~ ~~bathroom~~ ~~agent~~ ~~just~~ ~~dropped~~ ~~in~~ ~~to~~ ~~. . .~~ ~~go~~ ~~into~~ ~~a~~ ~~few~~ ~~things~~.—

— The bathroom door opens.

Well, to check some of the measurements . . .

Roger closes it.

And again. —

— The bathroom door opens.

Do one or two odd jobs . . .

Roger closes it.

Belinda suddenly discovers a prospective tenant over the house.

Selsdon has discovered the whisky

~~Vicki~~ ~~Fred~~ ~~trick~~ ~~left~~ ~~on~~ ~~the~~ ~~door~~?

Selsdon opens the bottle, smells it, closes it again and then goes off to the dressing-rooms with it.

Roger ~~trick~~ goes to run after

Belinda. Belinda kindly refuses it. Her interest is definitely aroused. Wait there – sit still – do

absolutely nothing – while she runs after **Selsdon**.

*Exit Belinda in the direction of the dressing-rooms in pursuit of Selsdon.*

**Dotty** makes her exit . . . — shaking her head with misery, and begins to weep.

**Roger** Only she's been in the family for generations.

**Vicki** She's a dame, on aly from (She starts upstairs.) I've got to be in

**Dotty** spoke her on the shoulder,

**Roger** Perhaps even if for all just have a glass of champagne.

**Vicki**'s We'll take it to be sure.

**Roger** Yes, well, pushes the

**Vicki**ies back to the other hand out of sight.

edges her towards the door.

**Roger** last, only **Dotty** realises

**Vicki** isn't what the newspaper.

*Enter Vicki from bathroom.*

**Vicki** That's not the bedroom.

**Roger** The bedroom? No, that's the downstairs bathroom and WC suite. And this is the housekeeper, Mrs Crockett.

**Mrs Clackett** Clackett, dear, Clackett. Only now I've lost the newspaper.

— *Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, carrying the sardines.*

**Roger** I'm sorry about this.

**Vicki** That's all right. We don't want the television, do we?

**Roger** Well . . .

**Vicki** Her?

**Frederick** runs and fetches it from the props table. **Dotty** realises that

she is still holding the sardines, and

hurls them to **Frederick** just in time

. . .

. . . to make her entrance. —

— *Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, with the newspaper but without the sardines.*

*Enter Belinda from the dressing-rooms leading a bewildered Selsdon, but without the whisky.*

**Mrs Clackett** Sardines . . .

Sardines . . . It's not for me to say, of course, dear, only I will just say this: don't think twice about it – take the plunge. You'll really enjoy it here.

**Frederick** tells her what a terrible state **Dotty** is in.

**Vicki** Oh. Great.

**Mrs Clackett** (to **Vicki**) And we'll enjoy having you. (To **Roger**.) Won't we, love?

**Roger** Oh. Well.

**Vicki** Terrific.

**Mrs Clackett** Sardines, sardines. Can't put your feet up on an empty stomach, can you.

They turn to watch her anxiously as she makes her exit. ——— **Exit Mrs Clackett** to service quarters.

**Vicki** You see? She thinks it's great. She's even making us sardines!

**Seldson** Well, the opportunity to ~~visit~~ ~~again~~ ~~the~~ ~~dressing~~ ~~rooms~~.

**Belinda** ~~Tens~~ ~~after~~ ~~Seldson~~.

**Frederick** goes to ~~way~~ ~~after~~ ~~her~~, but

**Roger** (picking up the ~~box~~) sure all right. Before she comes back with **Dotty** sardines.

**Vicki** ~~Dotty~~ ~~is~~ ~~here~~? smiling bravely

**Roger** telling **Frederick** that she has pulled herself together, thanks to him.

**Dinky** gives **Frederick** a kiss to

**Roger** ~~has~~ ~~grotes~~ ~~des~~.

As **Garry** ~~on~~ ~~Roger~~ ~~rough~~ ~~Vicki~~ ~~the~~ ~~to~~ ~~mezzanine~~ ~~bathroom~~.

**Vicki** (off) ~~mezzanine~~ ~~her~~ ~~brother~~ ~~brother~~ ~~brother~~ catches a fleeting glimpse of the kiss.

They reappear.

**Frederick** takes the cardboard box and goes to make his entrance,

**Vicki** turns ~~back~~ ~~trying~~ ~~to~~ ~~get~~ ~~the~~ ~~flight~~ ~~bag~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~books~~ ~~round~~ ~~for~~ ~~Belinda~~

**Roger** it ~~from~~ ~~Am~~ ~~Belinda~~. He urgently shows **Dotty** the flight bag and

**Belinda** ~~the~~ ~~situation~~ ~~door~~ ~~the~~ ~~first~~ ~~along~~ ~~the~~ ~~gallery~~. **Vicki** leads the

**Garry** appears in the linen cupboard doorway. ——— He takes a

good ~~Roger~~ ~~follows~~ ~~as~~ ~~nest~~ ~~colloquy~~ ~~between~~ ~~Frederick~~ ~~and~~ ~~Dotty~~.

**Vicki** Oh, black sheets!

**Garry** ~~shakes~~ ~~the~~ ~~sheet~~ ~~from~~

**Roger** ~~It's~~ ~~the~~ ~~airing~~ ~~cupboard~~.

**Garry** ~~this~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~time~~ ~~to~~ ~~come~~. **Frederick**

~~and~~ ~~Dotty~~ ~~the~~ ~~bag~~ ~~the~~ ~~box~~ ~~and~~ ~~struggles~~ ~~nervously~~ ~~to~~ ~~open~~ ~~the~~ ~~second~~ ~~stage~~ ~~along~~ ~~the~~ ~~gallery~~, ~~the~~ ~~bedroom~~.

**Dotty** starts to run off to get

**Vicki** Oh, you're in a real state!

**Belinda**, but has to run back to help **Frederick**.

**Belinda** runs in from the dressing-room, holding the bottle of whisky.

She grabs the flight bag, just manages to give the whisky to **Dotty**, and . . .

. . . make her entrance. ———

Enter **Selsdon** from the dressing-rooms.

He asks **Dotty** for the whisky.

~~**Philip** just disarms **Garry** on the balcony but forcefully explains that he will no longer, through the espionage like this with our Frederick's anniversary!~~

~~**Belinda** picks up the bag and the whisky sheff **Flavia** and **Dotty** as they.~~

~~**Philip**. There is something to be said for being a tax exile.~~

**Garry** and **Dotty** both turn on him in fury.

~~**Flavia** pleads with **Dotty** – kneels – weeps – hangs on to her plate of **Philip**s. Inland Revenue may hear us!~~

~~**Dotty** breaks the bag from **Garry** entrance. and **Selsdon** goes to makes points her out that she is still holding the whisky.~~

**Garry** takes it off her as she makes her entrance. ———

**Selsdon** tries to get the whisky off **Garry**, but **Garry** turns to ascend the platform for his entrance.

~~**Mrs Clackett** jumps up something~~

You can't even get the door open.

*Exeunt **Roger** and **Vicki** into the bedroom.*

*The sound of a key in the lock and the front door opens. On the doorstep stands **Philip**, carrying a cardboard box.*

**Philip** . . . No, it's Mrs Clackett's afternoon off, remember.

—— Enter **Flavia**, carrying a flight bag like **Roger**'s.

**Flavia** Home!

**Philip** Home, sweet home!

**Flavia** Dear old house!

~~**Flavia** explains that he will no longer, through the espionage like this with our Frederick's anniversary!~~

~~**Belinda** picks up the bag and the whisky sheff **Flavia** and **Dotty** as they.~~

~~**Philip**. There is something to be said for being a tax exile.~~

**Flavia** Leave those!

*He drops the bag and box, and kisses her. She flees upstairs, laughing, and he after her.*

**Philip** Sh!

~~**Flavia** pleads with **Dotty** – kneels – weeps – hangs on to her plate of **Philip**s. Inland Revenue may hear us!~~

~~**Dotty** breaks the bag from **Garry** entrance. and **Selsdon** goes to makes points her out that she is still holding the whisky.~~

—— Enter **Mrs Clackett** from the service quarters carrying a fresh plate of sardines.

**Mrs Clackett** (to herself) What I did with that first lot of sardines I shall never know.

*She puts the sardines on the telephone table and sits on the sofa.*

**Philip** and **Flavia** (looking down from the gallery) Mrs Clackett!

~~Mrs Clackett~~ ~~who~~ ~~you~~ ~~and~~ ~~gives~~ ~~me~~ ~~a~~ ~~turn!~~ My heart jumped right out  
~~Brooke~~ ~~boots!~~

~~Belinda~~ ~~sees~~ ~~id~~ ~~tried~~ ~~idea~~ ~~what~~ ~~she's~~ ~~supposed~~ ~~to~~ ~~do~~ ~~with~~ ~~it.~~

~~Flavia~~ ~~steps~~ ~~down~~ ~~through~~ ~~the~~ ~~steps~~ ~~right~~ ~~in~~ ~~front~~ ~~of~~ ~~Selsdon,~~ ~~in~~ ~~order~~ ~~to~~

~~Mrs Clackett~~ ~~ent~~ ~~though~~ ~~while~~ ~~Selsdon~~ ~~she~~ ~~back~~ ~~snatches~~ ~~is~~ ~~turned~~

~~Philip~~ ~~and~~ ~~Wen~~ ~~are~~ ~~al~~ ~~We~~ ~~are!~~

**Flavia** You haven't seen us!

~~Belinda~~ ~~Wen~~ ~~is~~ ~~not~~ ~~here!~~ **Brooke**

~~Mrs Clackett.~~ ~~Brooke~~ ~~opens~~ ~~your~~ ~~things,~~ ~~look.~~ *(She indicates the bag*  
*and box apprehendingly.*

**Philip** Oh. Yes. Thanks.

*He comes downstairs, and picks up the bag and box.*

*Exit Selsdon to the dressing-rooms* **Mrs Clackett (to Flavia)** Oh,  
*with the whisky.* and that bed hasn't been aired,  
love.

**Flavia** I'll get a hot-water  
bottle.

**Belinda** *makes her exit.* —

— *Exit Flavia into the*  
*mezzanine bathroom.*

**Mrs Clackett** I've put all your  
letters in the study, dear.

~~Belinda~~ ~~Oh,~~ ~~go~~ ~~and~~ ~~see~~ ~~for~~ ~~Selsdon~~ ~~if~~ ~~then~~ ~~makes~~ ~~drinking~~

~~Mrs Clackett~~ ~~to~~ ~~give~~ ~~but~~ ~~Brooke~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~pigeon~~ ~~hole~~ ~~towards~~ ~~the~~

~~Philip~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~pigeon~~ ~~hole~~ ~~Selsdon's~~ ~~incomprehensible~~ ~~gesture~~ ~~of~~

~~Mrs Clackett.~~ *Exit Belinda* ~~pigeon~~ ~~hole~~ ~~the~~ ~~dressing~~ ~~desk,~~ ~~love.~~

~~Early,~~ ~~Mrs Clackett~~ ~~to~~ ~~each~~ ~~Philip~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~study.~~ ~~Dot~~ ~~Philip~~ ~~is~~ ~~still~~ ~~holding~~  
*the bag and box* ~~is~~  ~~fetched~~ ~~back~~ ~~by~~ ~~Brooke~~ . . .

. . . *for his entrance.* —

— *Enter Roger from the*  
*bedroom, still dressed, tying his tie.*

**Belinda** *Yes, but* ~~urgently~~ ~~and~~ ~~signals!~~

*Enter Vicki* ~~from~~ ~~the~~ ~~Selsdon~~ ~~is~~ ~~in~~ ~~her~~ ~~underwear.~~

*drinking in the lavatory.*

**Friederick** *Mor* ~~as?~~ ~~What~~ ~~crossing~~ ~~voices?~~

**Roger** *ex* ~~People'd~~ ~~with~~ ~~his,~~ ~~but~~ ~~is~~

~~Vicki~~ ~~(back~~ ~~by~~ ~~Belinda~~ ~~mist~~ ~~ers)~~ Oh, look, she's opened our  
~~sardines.~~ ~~sit~~ ~~down.~~

**Dotty** ~~and~~ ~~Belinda~~ ~~is~~ ~~takes~~ ~~towards~~

**Roger** ~~sings~~ ~~rhems~~ ~~instead,~~ ~~but~~

**Roger** ~~in~~ ~~frantic~~ ~~back~~ ~~has~~ ~~to~~ ~~run~~ ~~back~~

**Vicki** ~~in~~ ~~study~~ ~~to~~ ~~go~~ ~~on.~~ **Belinda**

**Roger** ~~back~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~prison~~ ~~by~~ ~~for~~ ~~and~~ ~~go~~ ~~downstairs~~ ~~like~~ ~~that.~~

*sardines, gives them to Dotty, just*

*in time for her . . .*

**Vicki** Why not?

**Roger** Mrs Crackett.

**Vicki** Mrs Crackett?

**Roger** One has certain obligations.

. . . to make her entrance. ——

—— **Enter Mrs Clackett** from the study. She is carrying the first plate of sardines.

**Mrs Clackett** (to herself)

Sardines here. Sardines there. It's like a Sunday school outing.

**Brooke** makes her exit. ——

—— **Roger** pushes **Vicki** through the first available door, which happens to be the linen cupboard.

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, my, are you still poking around, are you?

**Roger** Yes, still poking around, are you?

**Selsdon**, then runs back to remind her . . .

**Mrs Clackett** In the airing cupboard, were you?

**Roger** In the linen cupboard

door. The linen cupboard door begins to open. He slams it shut.

**Enter Tim** checking the sheets and pillowcases. Going through the

wardrobe, smaller, bunch of

flannels. He takes his raincoat

**Mrs Clackett** **Tim** **Belinda** in

**Mrs Clackett** **Clackett**, dear, Clackett.

situation and exits to the dressing-rooms.

**Tim** asks **Frederick** where she is going.

**Frederick** demonstrates raising the elbow.

She puts down the sardines beside the other sardines.

**Roger** Mrs Clackett. Is there anyone else in the house, Mrs Clackett?

**Enter Belinda** from the dressing-rooms. She demonstrates that **Selsdon** has locked himself in somewhere.

**Mrs Clackett** I haven't seen no one, dear.

**Roger** I thought I heard voices.

**Mrs Clackett** Voices? There's no voices here, love.

**Roger** I must have imagined it.

**Frederick** breaks off from the

—— **Philip** (off) Oh, good Lord

conversation to say ————— above!

**Tim** hands **Belinda** the flowers and **Roger**, with his back to her, picks dashes out to the dressing-rooms. ————— up both plates of sardines.

**Belinda** begs the question?

**Mrs Clackett** tells her good friend above, the study door's open.

She crosses the fire-place.

**Roger** looks out of the window.

door down.

**Belinda** says to another off to the side! That's not Mr Hackham's, is it?

**Mr Clackett** says to the other off to the side!

**Poppy** **Roger** is holding both plates of sardines.

entrance coming up. **Belinda** runs up on to the platform, finds that she is still holding the axe and gives it to

**Brooke**.

But before **Belinda** can explain what to do with **Flavia**, she has to make her entrance. ————— mezzanine bathroom, carrying a

**Garry** advances threateningly upon **Frederick** and she sees the linen suspiciously at the flowers he is holding up board door swinging open as she passes, pushes it shut and turns the key.

**Flavia** Nothing but flapping doors in this house.

**Frederick** is still holding **Garry** the

flowers. **Frederick** is still holding **Philip**, holding a tax demand and its envelope. —————

**Philip** comes from the office. the steps will be taken . . . distraint . . .

platforms in the office. what she

**Mrs Clackett** does with her hand and that reminds me, a gentleman come

**Garry** takes a thoughtful and puts

**Philip** into her hands. not here.

**Mrs Clackett** says to the other off to the side! down and turn on the . . . sardines,

platform of the office. **Belinda** doesn't know – if it wasn't fixed to my shoulder it'd be **Garry** with it was.

axe, as he looks at it and feels the edge. He looks at the door through which **Frederick** will exit. **Belinda**

looks at the door likewise. **Garry**

looks back at the axe. **Belinda**

looks back at the axe. **Garry** begins to smile an evil smile. Horrified,

**Belinda** quickly takes the flowers from **Brooke** and sends her off in

her place to find **Selsdon**, then tries to get the axe away from **Garry**. **Garry** holds it behind his back. **Belinda**, still holding the flowers, puts her arms round **Garry**, trying to reach the axe.

~~**Dotty** Exit **Mrs. Claekett** to the music room.~~ **Belinda** with her **Philip** pound **Garry** get this! I'm not here. I'm in Spain. But if I didn't **Poppo** didn't **Belinda** upstairs for her entrance. **Belinda** flees up to the platform **Flavia** fears the door to make her entrance.

She makes one desperate effort to grab the dress from the backstage hook where it is hanging, then gives up, and enters still carrying the flowers instead. —————

——— She is holding the dress that **Vicki** arrived in.

**Belinda**, on stage, has to vary the line. —————

——— . . . or rather a bunch of flowers like this, did I?

~~**Philip** (absorbed) self **Dotty** **Garry**. **Flavia** I should not be playing anything as tarty as this . . . Oh, it's not so much your **Dotty** snatches it from him and raises it to hit him.~~

**Flavia** Darling, I never had a dress . . .

as tarty as this . . . Oh, it's not

**Philip** I should never have touched it.

**Flavia** No, it's lovely.

**Philip** Stick it down. Put it back. Never saw it.

~~**Frederick** **Philip** into study. and~~

~~**Flavia** Well, I'll front **Dotty** the the give of it to **Frederick** quite right to wear.~~

to **Garry**, who raises it to hit **Frederick**. **Dotty** snatches it from **Garry** and raises it once again to hit him.

**Belinda** appears ————— and snatches the axe from **Dotty**. . . . . as **Garry** makes his entrance.—

——— Exit **Flavia** along the upstairs corridor.

——— Enter **Roger** through the front door, still carrying both plates of sardines.

~~**Roger** **Tim** from the right room. No **What's going on** from **Belinda** and~~

~~He puts the address down~~ – one plate on the telephone table, where it  
~~was~~ **Belinda** is going to get for full door – and goes towards the study . . .  
him, but then realises that there is .

..

. . . no knocking ————— ——— Knocking!

because **Brooke** is still off.

**Garry** on stage repeats the line. ——— Knocking . . . ! Knocking . . .  
? Upstairs!

**Belinda** ~~writes~~ and realises knocks  
~~what's knocking~~ get with a prop. —

Oh my God, there's something in  
the airing cupboard! (*He unlocks it  
and opens it.*)

**Brooke** doesn't make ——— her  
entrance because she is still off in  
the dressing-rooms.

—— Looks for **Vicki**.

**Garry** comes through the linen  
cupboard door to look for **Brooke**.

Oh, it's you.

He improvises. ————— ——— Is it you . . . ? I mean, you

**Belinda** tells **Poppy** to read in **Brooke's** ~~hidden under~~ all the sheets

**Belinda** hands the flowers to **Frederick** and ~~takes him off to the dressing~~  
rooms. stand here and, you know,  
indefinitely . . .

**Poppy** (reading) Of course it's

**Roger** But, darling, why in the  
dark! With all black sheets and  
things! —————

Why did I lock the door? Why did ———  
you lock the door! —

Enter **Lloyd** like a whirlwind  
through the pass door. He demands  
silently to know what's going on.

**Roger** I didn't lock the door!

**Frederick** tries to explain, while

**Poppy** and **Garry** continue to play  
the scene.

**Poppy** (reading) Someone locked ———  
the door! —————

**Roger** Anyway, we can't stand  
here like this.

**Frederick** hands **Lloyd** the flowers  
to make ready for his entrance.

**Poppy** (reading) Like what?

**Roger** In your underwear.  
OK, I'll take it off.———

**Roger** In here, in here!

~~Enter Lloyd from the study, holding~~

~~the tax demand, the envelope, and~~  
~~and in a flash, to the terrified~~ **Poppy**

that she is to go on for **Brooke**.

Enter **Belinda** from the dressing-  
rooms with **Brooke**, just in time for  
her to see **Lloyd** tearing **Poppy's**  
skirt off.

**Philip** Darling, this glue. Is it  
the sort that you can never get  
unstuck . . . ? Oh, Mrs Clackett's  
made us some sardines.

Exit **Philip** into the study with the  
tax demand, envelope, glue and one  
of the plates of sardines from the  
telephone table.

~~Garry stands by the door, holding~~  
~~the hot-water bottle. He~~  
~~looks for Brooke the landing~~

~~Roger of Brooke, who had not~~  
~~put it there!~~

**Poppy**, and instead urges **Brooke**

upstairs for the next scene, for  
which she is now late.

**Garry** improvises. ———

**Brooke** makes her entrance

through the linen cupboard door . . .  
standing out here, with the hot-  
water bottle in my hands . . .

—— I didn't put this hot-water  
bottle. I mean, you know, I'm

— . . . **Vicki** (off) plays the piano in the dark!

~~Which she says she Brooke's thing!~~  
~~stability. Dotty asks Lloyd if the~~

~~Rogers as needed for the bath, pushing, filling the hot-water bottles.~~  
~~Dotty~~

~~What?~~ touched. She gives **Lloyd** a grateful kiss . . .

. . . just as **Garry** appears to see it.—— Exit **Roger** into the mezzanine  
bathroom.

**Vicki** Why did I lock the door?  
Why did you lock the door!

**Garry** moves closer to see, and cuts ——— **Roger** (off) Don't panic!  
three pages of script.———

~~Enter Roger, standing before him, unable to think where he is or~~

~~where he is, and perfectly certain that he is in the study for about this in the fact of Mrs~~  
~~Spalding and every other duck that happens to be in the study. 'Where are you?' . . .~~

~~**Poppy** stands by the door, looking at the pages of the book in the study~~  
~~study, while Garry and everyone else look over her shoulder.~~

Exit **Roger** into the service quarters.

Enter **Tim** from the dressing-rooms, **Vicki** opens the study door.  
leading **Selsdon**, who is holding his

trousers up. **Tim** is holding the whisky and the axe embedded in a shattered section of the door of the Gents. He hands the whisky to **Frederick**.

**Frederick** roars with surprise, ———— There's a roar of exasperation  
————— claps a hand from **Philip**, off. She turns and  
over his mouth, then realises that he flees.  
was supposed to roar anyway.

**Vicki** Roger! There's a strange figure in there! Where are you?

~~When he is alone, Frederick Philip, off.~~

~~Enter **Nick** the butler, who turns through the front door, chairs, grabs his props and . . .~~

~~... enters **Philip** from the study. He is holding the tax demand in his right hand, the door of the study is ajar, and a flower vase from **Dotty**, **Philip** has in his right hand, leaving **Tim** with a silly grin. He holds the string of the toy, who then runs into **Brook**. **Philip** is sitting at a table, and **Brook** has it on to the floor and runs out to the dressing-rooms.~~

Enter **Flavia** along the upstairs corridor, carrying various pieces of bric-a-brac.

**Eloy** is giving **Darling** a flower, and **Philip** is going to bed I'm going to clear out the attic, puts his raincoat on and exits

**Philip** to the dressing-room! I'm glued to a tax demand!

**Flavia** Darling, why don't you put the sardines down?

**Philip** explains the plate of sardines shown on the table. But when he takes his hand away, the sardines are gone.

**Philip** a Darling, the sardines are gone!

**Flavia** his Darling, do you play the fool. Get that bottle marked poison. **Seld** on the stairs, he is full of it.

**Frederick** conceals beneath the chairs. He picks it up, and **Lloyd** snatches it out of his hand.

Exit **Flavia** along the upstairs corridor.

**Philip** (flapping the tax demand) I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, but this is ridiculous.

**Frederick** exits————— and ——— Exit **Philip** into the  
sees that **Selsdon** is otherwise downstairs bathroom.  
occupied.

**Frederick** repeats the cue — and ——— **Philip** But this is ridiculous.  
slams the door again.

They all suddenly realise that this is Exit **Philip** into the downstairs  
**Selsdon**'s cue. They rush him to the bathroom.  
window. He raises his arms to open  
the window and his trousers fall  
down.

They bundle him on as best they can.————— ——— The window opens, and  
through it appears an elderly  
**Burglar**.

~~Blue light. No bars. Then Garry alarm. They ought to be prosecuted for  
inaction. He snatches the flowers from Dotty,  
He climbs them on the floor.~~

**Frederick** reproachfully picks them  
up, and hands them back to **Dotty**.

~~Garry, sometimes from all day. I want to sit down and weep. When I  
think of what I used to do for **Frederick** when I remember I used to do bullion~~

~~**Dotty**! What am I looking for now? I'm breaking into paper bags! So  
Belinda, they're offering? (He peers at the television.) One microwave  
here arms protectively round~~

~~**Frederick**. **Belinda** slumps the sofa.~~

~~Where's **Poppy**? **Poppy**'s desk is worth lifting it.~~

~~**Belinda** snatches the **Frederick** ornaments.~~

from **Dotty**. **Dotty** snatches him  
back. They snatch him back and  
forth, like two dogs with a bone,  
then push him aside and face up to  
each other. **Dotty** grabs the axe  
from **Garry** to use on **Belinda**. But  
they are distracted because . . .

Junk . . . Junk . . . if you insist . .

.

He pockets some small item.  
Where's his desk? No, they all say  
the same thing . . .

**Selsdon** appears at the front door. ——— He opens the front door to get  
a prompt.

**Selsdon** Yes? Yes? 'They all say  
the same thing . . . ?'

**Poppy** runs back with the flowers

to the corner to give him his prompt.

**Poppy** 'It's hard to adjust to retirement.'

**Selsdon** Hard to what?

**Omnes** (*shouting*) 'Adjust to retirement!'

**Selsdon** goes back on.——

——It's hard to assess a requirement . . .

**Selsdon** makes his exit.——

—— **Exit Burglar** into the study.

**Dotty** is about to resume her attack upon **Belinda** when she realises that **Garry** is already making his entrance.——

—— **Enter Roger** from the service quarters.

**Betty** hands **Anna** the prospectus. The tenant naturally wishes to know if the **Belinda** and previous history of paranormal phenomena.

**Enter Mrs Clackett**, holding another plate of sardines.

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, yes, dear, it's all nice and paranormal.

**Lloyd** subsides despairingly into a chair.

**Roger** I mean, has anything ever dematerialised before? Has anything ever . . .

**Frederick** indicates that he will go after **Brooke**.

**Belinda** insists that she will do it. He sees the television set on the She runs towards the dressing-room sofa. with the axe, sees **Lloyd** taking a despairing swig of whisky, and runs back to take the bottle away from him.

**Frederick** buttons his hair and buttons his jacket, and exits with

**Mrs Clackett** pursues her in the dressing room, the telephone table, moves the **Belinda** back, and closes the door. **Lloyd** has drunk, puts it out of his **Mrs Clackett** follows him, saying No, the things **Selsdon** has picked up the whisky, and, just like they do in any house.

**Roger** in from the dressing room, prospective tenant. She is inspecting the study, a third, very small bunch of flowers. He gives the door to **Lloyd**.

The **Belinda** shows **Lloyd Selsdon**

**Mrs Clackett** who nobody has no one in the house, love.

**Roger** and **Lloyd** go to study door with him, then comes back to give

**Belinda** the flowers so as to leave his hands free. **Selsdon** quickly

**Lloyd searches Selsdon. —**

**Mrs Clackett** (*glancing briefly*) I can't see no one.

**Rejoice** and thank the see him! But this is a joy of a different kind. And why for this flower? respective tenant? I left her in there! She's gone! My

She ~~reluctantly~~ <sup>reluctantly</sup> starts to take the  
Mrs. Clackett ~~then~~ <sup>then</sup> ~~poers~~ <sup>poers</sup> what the  
spectacle of **Belinda**, with flowers,  
kissing **Lloyd**.

**Roger** *sees him as he takes his*  
**Miss Clackett** *puts her incoat back*  
**Roger** *in, Thunders in to Lloyd*  
*and wearily holds out his hand for*  
*money.*

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, the sardines.

**Roger** You can see the sardines.

**Lloyd** *wearily hands the axe to Frederick and gives Tim his last small change.*

~~Mrs Blackett~~ *the dressmaker* ~~the~~ *sardines.*

**Rejoice** as ~~soon~~ <sup>they</sup> ~~realise~~ <sup>they</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>they</sup> ~~they~~ <sup>then</sup> picks up the plate.

*Mrs. Clarkett attracts all the way they're going, too. attention and puts them on **Poppy's** table with the other flowers.*

**Brooke** is amazed and even more upset to see that the flowers are in fact for **Poppy**. She puts her overcoat back on and turns to walk out again.

**Roger** I'm not letting these sardines out of my hand. But where is my prospective tenant?

**Flora** stops *dies*, and *dying* she *espontaneously* round for some other token of Mrs. **Clackett** to give *going to be* other *flowers* *dines* all night, in and

**Fredéric**, like a putting a tin can back on the fire point, finds the Exit Mrs. Chloé et back the household qualets- another bottle!

**Belgeon Vakk!** *A little from*

**Ered Reiger, but they do take a bathroom.**

**Seldom** *in time for. . .*

... ~~Seldo Butch~~ **Brook** ~~from his ether study~~, carrying an armful of silver cups, **Lloyd** gives the whisky to **Brooke**, kisses her, and tries to persuade

~~Berglar~~ No! I miss the violence, I miss the height  
around to terrify.

Frederick takes the whisky out of ~~He dumps the silverware on the sofa~~  
Brooke's hands. ~~and exits into the study.~~

~~Elroy Roger~~ if back man him bath too Brooke. Frederick takes it away  
Roger to ~~Waver~~ to Dotty, ~~turning~~ her round to show that it came  
from ~~Half Roger~~ into the bedroom.

. . . Garry makes his exit and sees Dotty now apparently being  
hugged by Frederick. ———

~~Garry~~ ~~Berglar~~ to ~~from~~ the study, carrying Philip's box and bag. He  
puts the ~~box~~ out behind the sofa and loads the  
silverware into the bag over Dotty's

~~Berglar~~ Every nice even Brooke, half shouting and screaming around  
young Half is ~~leaving~~ her gets you to her.  
hands helplessly upraised.

~~Garry~~ ~~mark Roger~~ ~~from~~ the linen cupboard, still holding the sardines.  
Roger to ~~his~~ ~~with~~ whisky down on the steps to deal with the sardines  
on her head.

~~Garry~~ ~~from Roger~~ into the bedroom  
~~Berglar~~ the whisky and ends up talking to myself . . .  
swig, very pleased with himself.

~~While~~ ~~Garry~~ ~~arrives~~ to study platform of Roger head back, Dotty climbs  
Enter Philip ~~from~~ this door stairs to bedroom. His right hand is still stuck  
to ~~every one~~, ~~down~~ ~~to~~ ~~look~~ ~~for~~ ~~the~~ ~~plurified~~ sardines.

Philip Darling, this stuff that eats through anything. It eats  
through trousers!

~~Elroy~~ ~~misses~~ ~~cholar~~ ~~Berglar~~ the ~~Garry~~ ~~brushes~~ him aside because he has  
Darling ~~at~~ ~~eating~~ ~~through~~ trousers, you don't think it goes on and  
~~Garry~~ ~~rough~~ the whisky ~~downing~~! I think I'd better get these trousers  
off! (He begins to do so, as best he can.) Darling, I think I can feel it! I  
think it's eating through . . . absolutely everything!

makes his entrance ———  
falling headlong over his feet.

—— Enter Roger from the  
bedroom, still holding the sardines.  
Roger There's something evil in  
this house.

Philip pulls up his trousers.

Philip (aside) The Inland  
Revenue!

Dotty demonstrates to Belinda  
and Lloyd what she did, half  
delighted and half shocked at  
herself.

Roger (saw Philip, frightened) He's back!

Philip in ~~must~~ ~~ago~~, also half

~~Roger~~ ~~Stacy~~ half shocked.

**Philip** I won't, thank you.

**Selsdon** finds the bottle on the platform – yet another bottle!

**Philip** takes him this present from **Selsdon** mechanically.

**Roger**, **Dotty**, in the **Belinda** cell of take swigs. **Philip** holds on. You desert from all, other they fold the events on stage.

**Dotty** holds up her hand to get attention to the events on stage. She demonstrates that **Garry** is going to have to run downstairs.

*They all wait for the crash.*

**Roger** Speak!

**Philip** Yes, yes – Marbella!

**Roger** You're some kind of intruder!

**Philip** Well, nice to meet you.

*He waves goodbye with his right hand, then sees the tax demand on it and hurriedly puts it away behind his back.*

I mean, have a sardine.

*He offers the sardines on his left hand. His trousers, unsupported, fall down.*

**Roger** No, you're not! You're some kind of sex maniac! You've done something to Vicki! I'm going to come straight downstairs

...

— **Roger** falls downstairs.

*The sound of **Garry** falling downstairs.*————

*Even **Selsdon** can hear it.*

*No sound from the stage. Everyone listens and as they listen the laughter dies away.*

**Frederick**, on stage, improvises a line.————

*No reply.*

**Belinda** turns to **Dotty** in horror – she's killed him! **Belinda** opens the study door to go to **Garry**. **Lloyd** restrains her.

*At the sound of **Garry**'s voice*———— *they all relax.*

**Lloyd** takes another swig of whisky.

— **Philip** Are you all right?

— **Roger** (*faintly*) This is plainly a matter for the police. (*Into the phone.*) Police!

**Philip** I think I'll be running along.

**Frederick** makes his throat, still round his ankles, and the light the chief

~~do~~ressed to his nose. He looks into his handkerchief and comes over

~~Roger~~ Belinda and Dotty (*into the phone*.) Hello . . . police?

~~Lloyd~~ enters, has her look at Brooke, who has entered from the rooming up. His broken  
interspersed house overcoat off but Brooke, ~~exclaiming~~ from this young  
reverses her Belinda's Dotty, staggering under the weight of  
Frederick, and loses her lenses.

Belinda and Dotty drop Frederick and turn to deal with this next  
problem.

Garry repeats the cue. ———

—— And what's happened to her  
no one knows!

Garry appears, still hobbled, in the study doorway, and furiously  
repeats the cue yet again. ———

—— No one knows!

Belinda, Dotty and Lloyd guide Brooke, blinded and confused, and window.

still wearing her overcoat, to the window for her entrance, cracking  
her head against the set on the way. ———

They watch as Brooke falls  
headlong over the sofa on stage.

Vicki There's a man lurking in  
the undergrowth!

Roger (*into the phone*) Sorry . . .  
the young woman has  
reappeared. (*Hand over phone*.)  
Are you all right?

Vicki No, he almost saw me!

Selsdon suggests to Dotty that the  
lenses may be in her clothes.

Roger (*into the phone*) He  
almost saw her . . . Yes, but he's a  
burglar as well! He's taken our  
things!

Vicki (*finds Philip's bag and  
box*) The things are here.

Selsdon searches Dotty's clothes.  
She can't understand what he's  
after.

Roger (*into the phone*) So what  
am I saying? I'm saying, let's say  
no more about it. (*He puts the  
phone down*.) Well, put something  
on!

Vicki I haven't got anything!

Roger There must be something  
in the bathroom!

He picks up the box and bag, and  
leads the way.

Bring the sardines!

*She picks up the sardines.*

**Garry** comes hobbling and raging off,—— his shoes still tied together. He gazes in amazement at the sight of **Dotty** and **Selsdon**.

**Garry** repeats the cue. ——

**Lloyd** realises and rushes on, as **Frederick** loads him with props. ——

**Garry** moves to commit violence upon everyone in sight, but the state of his shoes prevents him from getting more than a step or two before he has to return . . .

. . . to make his entrance. ——

**Frederick** takes over the search in

—— Bring the sardines!

—— Enter the **Burglar** from the study and dumps more booty.

**Burglar** Right, that's downstairs tidied up a bit. (*He starts upstairs.*) Just give the upstairs a quick going-over for them.

Exit the **Burglar** into the mezzanine bathroom.

—— Enter **Vicki**, holding the ~~Dotty's clothes~~ white bathmat, and **Roger**, carrying the box and bag, from the downstairs bathroom.

**Vicki** A bathmat?

**Roger** Better than nothing!

**Vicki** I can't go around in front of our taxpayers wearing a bathmat!

*He leads the way upstairs.*

**Roger** I'll look in the bedroom.

You look in the other bathroom.

**Garry** makes his exit —— and is amazed to see **Dotty** now apparently embracing **Frederick**.

**Garry** starts downstairs to attack **Frederick**. But he is still hobbled and in any case . . .

**Frederick** has to make his entrance. ——

**Garry** tries to get **Brooke** to untie him.

But **Brooke** blindly has to make her entrance. ——

**Lloyd** takes over the search of

**Dotty's** clothing. **Garry** gazes in

—— Exit **Roger** into the bedroom and **Vicki** into the mezzanine bathroom.

—— Enter **Philip** through the front door.

**Philip** Darling! Help! Where are you?

—— Enter **Vicki** from the mezzanine bathroom.

**Vicki** Roger! Roger!

astonishment.

**Tim** enters from the dressing-rooms and hands **Lloyd** a cactus. *Exit Philip hurriedly, unseen by Vicki, into the downstairs bathroom.*

**Belinda** watches this anxiously. **Flavia** (off) — Oh, darling, I'm finding such lovely things!

**Lloyd** thanks her and comes down. **Dotty** sits at the table in the upstairs corridor, absorbed in the china tea service she is carrying.

**Vicki** enters, she looks down the stairs, takes the cactus from **Dotty**, **Flavia** enters, she looks down the stairs, still holding the cactus.

**Lloyd** tries to pursue him . . .

. . . but stops with a cry of pain. — **Vicki** screams, off.

**Flavia** — that you gave me on the very first anniversary of our . . . ?

*Enter Vicki from the downstairs bathroom. She stops at the sight of Flavia.*

**Flavia** puts her arms round **Lloyd** and says, "What a lovely day!"

**Lloyd** says, "What a lovely day!" and looks at his watch.

**Flavia** says, "What a lovely day!" and looks at her watch.

**Philip** enters from the downstairs bathroom, still with his hands

on his head, and says, "What a lovely day!" and looks at his watch.

**Brooke** enters from the downstairs bathroom, still with his hands

**Philip** Excuse me, I think you've dropped your dress.

**Flavia** gasps. **Philip** looks up at the gallery and sees her.

**Philip** (to **Flavia**) Where have you been? I've been going mad! Look at the state I'm in!

*He holds up his hands to show Flavia the state he is in and his trousers fall down. The tea service slips from Flavia's horrified hands, and rains down on the floor of the living-room below. Philip hurries towards the stairs, trousers round his ankles, his hands extended in supplication.*

**Philip** Darling, honestly!

**Brooke** makes her exit ———

—— **Vicki** flees before him, comes face to face with **Flavia**, and takes refuge in the linen cupboard.

**Brooke** begins to take off her overcoat.

~~**Philip** picks up the basket, but the room and her dress fell off!~~  
~~**Exit Flavia**, with **Brooke** **Philip** along the upstairs corridor.~~  
at it, baffled, while . . .

~~. . . **Garry** **Roger** from the bedroom, directly in **Philip**'s path.~~

~~**Philip** holds up the bathmat in front of his face, the assassin stops **Roger** though, because the bathmat is holding up the sight of **Lloyd** lowering his trousers and **Dotty** pulling needles out of his bottom.~~

**Roger** Here, put this sheet on for the moment while I see if there's something in the attic.

~~**Garry** **Roger** leaves **Philip** with the sheet and exits along upstairs~~  
~~**Philip** watches the scene below in~~  
~~**Philip** turns so good a **Bella** stairs.~~

Enter **Burglar** from the mezzanine bathroom, holding two gold taps.

**Burglar** One pair gold taps . . .

~~**Garry** **Philip** takes the dignity of **Philip**.~~  
~~**Oh, my God!** **Brooke** for use~~  
against **Lloyd** again.

**Tim** warns **Lloyd** about **Garry**.  
**Lloyd** quickly pulls up his trousers.

**Philip** Who are you?

**Burglar** Me? Fixing the taps.

**Philip** Tax? Income tax?

**Burglar** That's right, governor. In come new taps . . . out go old taps.

Exit **Burglar** into the mezzanine bathroom.

~~**Philip** takes the respect from **Garry** here!~~

~~**Roger** (soft) tells her back, that~~

~~**Philip** back to **Tim** one way so that~~

~~Exit **Philip** **Tim** holds the bathmat in front of his face.~~  
hook and . . .

. . . make his entrance. ———

—— Enter **Roger** along the upstairs

**Lloyd** lowers his trousers again for ~~**Dotty** **Philip** **Vicki** **Lloyd**~~

**Roger** I've found your dress! It came flying out of the attic at me!

~~**Garry** Exit **Roger** into mezzanine bathroom.~~

~~**Lloyd** **Philip** **Tim** holds the bathmat, trying to pull the bathmat off his head.~~

*needs no further attention.*

**Philip** Darling! I've got her dress stuck to my head now!

*Enter Roger from the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Frederick Philip** ~~into the bedroom.~~

**Roger** ~~the old shirts, which are~~

~~waiting for Burling and Brooke to~~ *mezzanine bathroom.*

*on. He flaps them at Brooke to*

*remind her about her change.*

**Burling** ~~in the door, flipping sheets~~ *governor.*

**Roger** ~~but the psittacine attacks~~ *on women?*

**Burling** ~~to try anything, go~~ *Lloyd,* but I'll do the taps on the bath

~~flashes~~ *her desperately while he*

*takes the cactus from Tim and gives*

*it to her as a token of his enduring*

*affection. She peers at it and he*

*takes in the nature of the present for*

*the first time himself. He turns in*

*pained query to Tim, who gestures*

*that it was all the shop had left – all*

*the rest of their stock is now on*

**Poppy's** desk.

*Exit Burling into the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Roger** ~~takes the cactus back~~ *where!* Where is Vicki? Vicki . . . ?

~~Exit Roger in pain, full of~~ *his* *bathroom.*

*present to Brooke again.*

**Frederick** *flaps the sheets in*

*desperation.*

**Brooke** *hesitates. Finally she takes*

*off her overcoat, runs up the steps*

*with the cactus.*

*Enter Burling from the mezzanine bathroom, heading for the front door.*

**Burling** People everywhere! I'm off. A tax on women? I don't know, they'll put a tax on anything these days.

*Enter Roger from the downstairs bathroom. The Burling stops.*

**Roger** If I can't find her, you're going to be in trouble, you see.

**Burling** WC? I'll fix it.

—— *Exit Burling into the*

**Selsdon** *makes his exit.*——

**Brooke** pushes the cactus into **Selsdon's** hands as she passes.

There is a swirl of sheets as **Frederick** attempts to dress **Brooke** in time for her entrance.

**Frederick** and **Brooke** make their ——— **Philip** attempts to enter from separate entrances ——— and discover the bedroom.

that they are unable to because their sheets are attached to each other.

**Belinda**, upstairs for her entrance, goes to disentangle them. So does **Selsdon**, but he and the cactus together makes things worse.

**Frederick** and **Brooke** are half on ——— **Vicki** attempts to enter from and half off. ——— **Garry** the linen cupboard.

watches with pleasure, until **Lloyd** furiously drives him . . .

. . . on stage to hold the fort. ———

**Garry** improvises. ———

**Tim** takes off his raincoat and starts to change at four on as **Frederick's** double. **Lloyd** rips it off his neatly, and knows four that it's needed as an emergency substitute for **Frederick's** after three . . . They pass the sheet to **Frederick**, but he is too bungled and doing anything with it.

**Belinda** gestures desperately to **Lloyd** for the real **Sheikh's** robes. **Lloyd** passes them up to **Belinda**, who hands them to **Frederick** . . .

. . . who is dragged on ——— through the linen cupboard already,

**Brooke**, still holding the second sheet, hiding the real **Sheikh's** robes. And

**Belinda** takes the cactus away from **Selsdon's** charmingly if not so down to **Lloyd** so that . . .

. . . she can make her entrance.

**Lloyd** puts the cactus in a safe

mezzanine bathroom again.

**Roger** Vicki . . . ?

Exit **Roger** through the front door.

——— Enter **Roger** through the front door.

——— **Roger** No Sheikh yet! I thought he was coming at four? I mean off his neatly, and knows four now. **Frederick's** after three . . . Because I've been standing here for a good, you know, it seems like forever . . . What's the time now. It must be getting on for five . . .

——— **Olivia** you're up here already, hiding the real **Sheikh's** robes. And **Selsdon's** charmingly if not so you want to see over the house now, do you, Sheikh? Right. Well. Since you're upstairs already **Roger** goes upstairs.

——— Enter **Flavia** along the upstairs corridor, carrying a vase.

**Flavia** Him and his floozie! I'll

*place on the chairs downstairs.*

**Tim** puts on the bathmat as burnous, to go on as **Philip's** double, but gestures to **Lloyd** that he now has no sheet to wear, because it has vanished on stage with **Frederick**.  
*They both register despair.*

**Lloyd** takes a despairing pull of whisky.

**Belinda** exits. —————

**Roger** and **Tim** indicate the.

**Frederick** the **Burglar** signs that the mezzanine bathroom.

*She instantly indicates Tim's own raincoat.*

**Lloyd** puts it on **Tim** back to front.

*They both gloomily inspect the result.*

**Frederick** makes his exit — dragging **Brooke** backwards with him, since they are still attached to each other.

break this over their heads!

**Roger, Philip and Vicki** go downstairs.

**Roger** (to **Philip and Vicki**) I'm sorry about this. I don't know who she is. No connection with the house, I assure you.

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters, with another plate of sardines. Roger advances to introduce her.*

**Mrs Clackett** No other hands, thank you, not in my sardines, 'cause this time I'm eating them.

**Roger** ushers **Philip and Vicki** away from **Mrs Clackett** towards the mezzanine bathroom.

*He opens the door to the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Roger** But in here . . .

**Flavia** Arab sheets?

— Exit **Flavia** into the bedroom.

**Burglar** Ballcocks, governor. Your ballcocks have gone.

**Roger** We have him. *Enter Flavia from the bedroom.*

**Mrs Clackett** You give me that sheet, you devil!

*She seizes the nearest sheet and it comes away in her hand to reveal Vicki.*

**Flavia** comes downstairs menacingly.

— Exit **Philip** discreetly into the study.

**Selsdon** improvises a line. —

— **Burglar** It's my little girl!  
So far as I could see before she  
went.

**Brooke** struggles back on, — as — **Vicki** Dad!  
best she can.

~~Tim finds Philip from the back of front raincoat~~ (He is now played by a  
~~Frederick~~ **Tim**) picked up the real burnous and flaps it in desperation  
~~Burglar~~ **Lloyd** is that little Vicki's that stills away from home. ~~Lloyd~~ **Lloyd** d'  
nag first again! a substitute is **Brooke**'s leopardskin overcoat. He  
~~Philip~~ **Frederick** (sighs) to put here's my back to front? as he did with  
**Tim** and the raincoat. He then crams the burnous on **Frederick**'s  
head, but **Frederick** has continued to turn, so it hangs over his face  
instead of his neck. **Lloyd** crams the **Sheikh**'s dark glasses on top of  
the burnous . . .

. . . and **Frederick** stumbles blindly — Enter through the front door a  
back on stage. — **Sheikh**, played by **Frederick**.

~~Sheikh~~ **Sheikh** picks up the whisky bottle and yells peace! I rent it!

~~Roger~~ **Roger** says to **Lloyd** is just about to know that face! (Pulls the **Sheikh**'s  
burnous aside to reveal his face.) He isn't a sheikh! He's that sex-  
man again! guiltily, because **Poppy** is  
standing agitatedly in front of him.

~~She~~ **She** talks to **Poppy** and from a  
link and puts it down, desperate to

~~Burglar~~ **Burglar** is full of her. She up to with my little girl down there in  
his presence to ask. But tell you one thing, **Vicki**  
understand. She whispers again,  
becoming more and more agitated.  
He puts a hand to his ear, meaning  
he can't hear.

**Vicki** What's that, Dad?

**Poppy** (screams to **Lloyd** in  
despair) I'm going to have a . . .

**Burglar** When all around is  
strife and uncertainty, there's  
nothing like a . . .

**Selsdon** flings the front door open. — He dries and goes to the front  
door.

**Selsdon** Good old-fashioned plate  
of what . . . ?

**Poppy** . . . baby!

**Selsdon** goes back on stage. —

**Poppy** claps her hand over her  
mouth, horrified.

**Lloyd** (whispers) And curtain,  
perhaps?

**Selsdon** A good old-fashioned  
plate of gravy!

**Poppy** Oh . . . !

*She runs back to the corner to bring ——— CURTAIN  
the curtain down.———*

*Everyone appears in the doors and  
windows, eager to know more.*

**Lloyd** *subsides, defeated, on to the  
cactus and springs up again in  
agony.*

CURTAIN

## Act Three

*The curtain goes up to reveal the tabs of the Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees. A half-empty whisky bottle nestles at the foot of them. The introductory music for Nothing On.*

*As the music finishes the tabs begin to rise. A foot or two above stage level they stop uncertainly, hover for a moment, and fall again.*

*Pause.*

*The introductory music starts again and is then faded out.*

*Enter **Tim** from the wings, in his dinner jacket, but with elements of the **Burglar's** gear visible beneath it, and the **Burglar's** cap on his head.*

**Tim** Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. (*He removes the **Burglar's** cap.*) Welcome to the the Old Fishmarket Theatre, Lowestoft, or rather the Municipal Theatre, Stockton-on-Tees, for this evening's performance of *Nothing On*. We apologise for the slight delay in starting tonight, which is due to circumstances . . .

**Belinda** (*off, screaming but indistinguishable*) Hands off Freddie! All right?

**Dotty** (*off, screaming but indistinguishable*) You're the one who's trying to get their hands on Freddie!

**Tim** . . . due to circumstances . . .

**Dotty** (*off, screaming but indistinguishable*) You don't own him, you know!

**Tim** . . . beyond our control . . .

*The sound of a slap, off, and **Dotty** screams in pain, off.*

. . . and we would ask you to bear with us for a moment while we deal with her. With them. With the circumstances. I should perhaps say that with tonight's performance of the play our long and highly

successful tour . . .

**Poppy** (*over Tannoy*) Ladies and gentlemen. We apologise for the delay in starting tonight, which is due to circumstances which have . . .

**Belinda** (*over Tannoy*) Don't you dare! Don't you dare!

**Poppy** (*over Tannoy*) . . . which have now been brought under control.

**Tim** . . . our long and highly successful tour is on its very last legs. Its very last leg. Thank you for your . . .

**Poppy** Thank you for your . . .

**Tim and Poppy** (*together*) . . . co-operation and understanding.

**Tim** I sincerely trust . . .

*He pauses for an instant to see if he will be interrupted again.*

I sincerely trust there will be no other . . .

*He becomes aware of the whisky bottle.*

. . . no other hiccups. No other hold-ups. So, ladies and gentlemen, will you please sit back and enjoy the remains of the evening.

*Exit Tim. A slight pause, then his arm comes out from under the tabs and retrieves the bottle.*

*The introductory music for Nothing On, and this time the tabs rise. The act is being seen from the front again, exactly as it was the first time, at the rehearsal in Weston-super-Mare.*

*Enter slowly and with dignity from the service quarters, limping painfully, Mrs Clackett. She is holding a plate in her left hand and a handful of loose sardines in her right.*

**Mrs Clackett** (*bravely*) It's no good you going on . . .

*She stops and looks at the phone. It hurriedly starts to ring.*

I can't pick sardines off the floor *and* answer the phone.

*She dumps the handful of sardines on the plate.*

I've only got one leg.

*She shifts the plate to her right hand and picks up the phone with the left.*

*(into the phone, bravely)* Hello . . . Yes, but there's no one here . . .  
No, Mr Brent's not here . . .

*She puts the plate of sardines down next to the newspaper on the sofa as she speaks and picks up the newspaper. She shakes the outer sheet free and wipes her oily hand on it as best she can. The rest of the newspaper disintegrates and falls back on top of the sardines.*

He lives here, yes, but he don't live here now because he lives in Spain. Mr Philip Brent, that's right . . . The one who writes the plays, only why he wants to get mixed up in plays God only knows, he'd be safer off in the lion's cage at the zoo . . . No, she's in Spain, too, they're all in Spain, there's no one here . . . Am *I* in Spain . . . ?

*She realises that she is holding the sheet of newspaper instead of the sardines. She turns round to look for them as she speaks, winding herself into the telephone cord.*

No, I'm not in Spain, dear, I'm in agony. I look after the house for them, but I go home at one o'clock on Wednesday, only I've got a nice plate of sardines to put my feet up with . . .

*She sits down uncertainly on the heap of newspaper.*

. . . because it's the royal what's it called on the telly – the royal you know . . .

*She realises that she is sitting on the sardines and extracts the plate as discreetly as possible as she speaks.*

. . . And if it's to do with letting the house then you'll have to ring the house agents, because they're the agents for the house . . .  
Squire, Squire, Hackham and who's the other one . . . ?

*She examines the flattened contents of the plate.*

No, they're not in Spain, they're just a bit squashed. Squire, Squire, Hackham and, hold on . . .

*She stands up to go, uncertainly balancing plate, sheet of newspaper and phone.*

. . . I'm going to do something wrong here.

*She starts to go, then realises there are loose sheets of newspaper all over the floor and bends down to pick them up. The sardines slide off the plate on to the floor.*

Always the same, isn't it.

*She starts to go again.*

One minute you've got too much on your plate . . .

*She realises that she has nothing on her plate, turns round and sees the sardines.*

. . . next thing you know they've gone again.

*She uncertainly drops a few sheets of the newspaper over the sardines and exits into the study, holding the empty plate and the telephone receiver. The body of the phone falls off its table and follows her to the door*

*The sound of a key in the lock. The front door opens. On the doorstep is Roger, carrying a cardboard box.*

**Roger** . . . I have a housekeeper, yes, but this is her afternoon off.

*Enter Vicki.*

*The body of the phone begins to creep inconspicuously towards the door.*

**Roger** So we've got the place entirely to ourselves.

**Roger** goes back and brings in a flight bag and closes the front door.

I'll just check.

*He halts the telephone with a casually placed foot. Vicki gazes round.*

**Roger** Hello? Anyone at home? No, there's no one here.

*He picks the phone up and puts it back on its table.*

So what do you think?

*He takes his hand off the phone and it springs back on to the floor.*

**Vicki** Great. And this is all yours?

*The phone starts to creep away again. Roger casually picks it up as he talks and puts it down on the sideboard.*

**Roger** Just a little shack in the woods, really. Converted posset mill. Sixteenth-century.

**Vicki** It must have cost a bomb.

*Another jerk on the wire catapults the phone across the room. Vicki pays no attention to it.*

**Roger** Well, one has to have somewhere to entertain one's business associates. Someone on the phone now, by the look of it.

*He picks the phone up and puts it back on the sideboard.*

It's probably this, you know, this Arab saying he wants to come at four, so I mean I'll just have a word with him and . . .

*He tries to pick up the receiver and finds that it's not there. As the conversation continues he follows the receiver cord along with his hand.*

**Vicki** Right, and I've got to get those files to our Basingstoke office by four.

**Roger** Yes, we'll only just manage to pick it in. I mean, we'll only just fit it up. I mean . . .

**Vicki** Right, then.

**Roger** We won't bother to pull the champagne.

*He pulls gently at the cord.*

**Vicki** All these doors!

**Roger** Oh, only a handful, really. Study . . . Kitchen . . . and a self-contained service flat . . .

*He tugs hard and the cord comes away without the receiver.*

. . . for the receiver.

**Vicki** Terrific. And which one's the . . . ?

**Roger** What?

**Vicki** You know . . .

**Roger** The usual offices? Through here, through here.

*He bundles up the phone and cable, and opens the downstairs bathroom door for her.*

**Vicki** Fantastic.

*Exit Vicki into the bathroom. Roger tosses the phone casually off after her.*

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, still walking with difficulty and holding the now cordless receiver.*

**Mrs Clackett** I've lost the sardines again . . .

*Mutual surprise. Roger closes the door to the bathroom.*

**Roger** I'm sorry. I thought there was no one here.

**Mrs Clackett** I'm not here. (*She looks round for the phone, so that she can replace the receiver.*) I don't know where I am.

**Roger** I'm from the agents.

**Mrs Clackett** Lost the phone now.

**Roger** Squire, Squire, Hackham and Dudley.

**Mrs Clackett** Never lost a phone before.

**Roger** I'm Tramplemain.

**Mrs Clackett** I'll just put it up here, look, if anyone wants it. (*She puts the receiver on top of the television.*)

**Roger** Oh, right, thanks. No, I just dropped in to . . . go into a few things . . .

*The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it. Mrs Clackett gets down on*

*her hands and knees, and looks under the newspaper.*

**Roger** Well, to check some of the measurements . . .

*The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it. Mrs Clackett goes to scoop up the sardines, but then looks round.*

**Roger** Do one or two odd jobs . . .

*The bathroom door opens. Roger closes it.*

**Mrs Clackett** Now the plate's gone.

**Roger** Oh, and a client. I'm showing a prospective client over the house.

*The bathroom door opens.*

**Vicki** What's wrong with this door?

**Roger** *closes it.*

**Roger** She's thinking of renting it. Her interest is definitely aroused.

*Enter Vicki from the bathroom.*

**Vicki** That's not the bedroom.

**Roger** The bedroom? No, that's the downstairs bathroom and WC suite. And this is the . . .

**Roger** *steps forward on to the newspapers to introduce Mrs Clackett. His foot slides away in front of him.*

**Mrs Clackett** Sardines, dear, sardines.

**Vicki** Oh. Hi.

**Roger** She's not really here.

**Mrs Clackett** *(looking under the newspaper)* Oh, you shouldn't have stood on them.

**Roger** *(to Mrs Clackett)* Don't worry about us.

**Mrs Clackett** They'll all go standing on them now.

**Roger** We'll just inspect the house.

**Mrs Clackett** I'd better give the floor a wash.

*Exit Mrs Clackett into the study, leaving the sardines beneath the newspaper on the floor.*

**Roger** I'm sorry about this.

**Vicki** That's all right. We don't want the television, do we?

**Roger** Television? That's right, television, she didn't explain about wanting to watch this royal, you know, because obviously there's been this thing with the . . . (*He indicates the sardines.*) I mean, I'm just, you know, in case anyone's looking at all this and thinking, 'My God!'

**Vicki** Great. Come on, then. (*She starts upstairs.*) I've got to be in Basingstoke by four.

**Roger** Sorry, love. I thought we ought to get that straight.

**Vicki** We'll take it up with us.

**Roger** Where are we?

**Vicki** And don't let my files out of sight.

**Roger** Hold on. We've got out of . . .

**Vicki** What?

**Roger** What?

**Vicki** Her?

**Roger** Her? OK . . . 'her'. Right, because she *has* been in the family for generations.

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, carrying a fire-bucket and a mop.*

**Mrs Clackett** Sardines . . . Sardines . . . It's not for me to say, of course, dear, only I will just say this: don't think twice about it – take the plunge . . . (*She plunges the mop into the fire-bucket.*) You'll really enjoy it here . . . (*She discovers that the mop won't go into the fire-bucket.*)

**Vicki** Oh. Great.

**Mrs Clackett** *removes the obstruction – a bottle of whisky.*

**Mrs Clackett** I'll put it here, look, then if he wants it he won't know where to find it . . .

**Mrs Clackett** *puts the bottle of whisky with the other bottles on the sideboard.*

**Vicki** Terrific.

**Mrs Clackett** Sardines, sardines. (*She hands the mop to Roger.*) You'll have to do the sardines, then, 'cause I've got to go back to the kitchen now and do some more sardines.

*Exit Mrs Clackett to service quarters.*

**Vicki** You see? She thinks it's great. She's even making us sardines!

**Roger** (*contemplates the bucket and mop uncertainly*) Well . . .

**Vicki** I think she's terrific.

**Roger** Terrific.

**Vicki** So which way?

**Roger** I don't know – kind of parcel them up in the . . . (*He holds out some sheets of newspaper to her.*) And I'll . . . (*He demonstrates the mop.*)

**Vicki** (*starts up the stairs*) Up here?

**Roger** Down here!

**Vicki** In here?

**Roger** OK, *I'll* do the . . . *you* do the . . .

*Exit Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom. Roger parcels up the sardines in the newspaper as best he can.*

**Vicki** It's another bathroom. (*She reappears.*)

**Roger** *dumps the parcel of sardines on the telephone table while he dabs hurriedly at the floor with the mop.*

**Roger** Take the box upstairs, then! Take the bag!

**Vicki** Always trying to get me into bathrooms.

**Roger** Bag! Box!

**Vicki** *moves to stand outside the airing cupboard.*

**Vicki** Oh, black sheets!

**Roger** *(runs to the stairs with bucket and mop, and holds them out to Vicki)* All right, take the . . . take the . . . take the . . . !

**Vicki** Oh, you're in a real state!

**Roger** *(despairingly)* Oh . . . !

**Roger** *runs back and abandons the bucket and mop to pick up the bag and box.*

**Vicki** You can't even get the door open.

*Exit Vicki into the bedroom.*

**Roger** *runs back to collect the bucket and mop, just as the front door opens to reveal Philip, carrying a cardboard box.*

**Philip** No, it's Mrs Clackett's afternoon off, remember. We've got the place . . .

**Philip** *freezes, as Roger flees upstairs with the bag and the box.*

**Philip** *follows Roger's progress out of the corner of his eye.*

*Enter Flavia, carrying a flight bag like Roger's.*

*The bedroom door shuts in Roger's face. He opens the door again and exits into the bedroom with the bag and box.*

**Philip** . . . entirely to ourselves.

**Flavia** Home.

**Philip** Home, sweet home.

**Flavia** Dear old house!

**Philip** Just waiting for us to come back!

**Flavia** (*producing the remains of the phone*) But how odd to find the telephone in the garden!

**Philip** I'll put it back.

*She hands him the phone – now in a very deteriorated condition – and he attempts to replace it on the telephone table. But it is still connected to its lead, which is too short, since it runs out through the downstairs bathroom door and back in through the front door.*

**Flavia** I thought I'd better bring it in.

**Philip** Very sensible. (*He tugs discreetly at the lead.*)

**Flavia** Someone's bound to want it.

**Philip** Oh dear. (*He tugs.*)

**Flavia** Why don't you put it back on the table?

**Philip** The wire seems to be caught.

**Flavia** Oh, look, it's caught round the downstairs bathroom.

**Philip** So it is.

**Philip** *takes the phone back out of the front room. Flavia with discreet violence pulls the lead out of the junction box where it originates. Philip re-emerges with the phone through the downstairs bathroom.*

**Flavia** I think I've disentangled it.

**Philip** I climbed through the bathroom window and . . . oh . . . oh . . .

*He takes the parcel of sardines off the telephone table and puts the telephone in its place.*

**Flavia** It's rather funny, though, creeping in like this for our wedding anniversary!

**Philip** It's damned serious! If Inland Revenue find out we're in the

. . .

*Attempting to fold up the newspaper tidily, he becomes distracted by the contents that come oozing out over his hands. His voice dies away.*

**Flavia** . . . country, even for one night . . .

**Philip** Sorry. (*He puts down the parcel of sardines on the sofa.*) Yes, because if Inland Revenue find out we're in the . . .

*He moves towards the champagne and slides, exactly like Garry, on the oily patch on the floor. He stops and looks back on it in surprise.*

**Flavia** . . . country . . .

**Philip** (*distracted*) . . . country . . .

**Flavia** . . . even for one night.

**Philip** . . . even for one night. . .

**Philip** *edges cautiously away from the oily patch.*

**Flavia** . . . bang goes . . .

*He bangs into the bucket and mop.*

**Flavia** . . . our claim to be resident abroad . . .

**Philip** *fumbles for his handkerchief and claps it to his nose.*

**Philip** Resident abroad. Absolutely. (*He looks into his handkerchief.*)

**Flavia** Bang goes most of this year's income.

**Philip** Most of this year's income . . . (*He puts the handkerchief away.*) So, yes, I think I'd better . . . (*He picks up bag and box, clutches them to himself for reassurance.*) . . . go and have a little lie-down.

*He starts up the stairs.*

**Flavia** (*surprised, but rallying*) Lie-down, yes, well, why not? No children. No friends dropping in . . . (*She moves the sofa to cover the oily patch as she speaks.*) We're absolutely on our . . . Leave those!

**Philip** Oh, yes.

**Philip** *puts the bag and box down, but by this time he is already upstairs.*

**Flavia** Downstairs! Not upstairs!

**Philip** I'm so sorry. I . . . (*He looks in his handkerchief again.*) Oh dear . . .

*He exits hurriedly into bedroom.*

**Flavia** (*picks up the fire-bucket and mop*) There is something to be said for being a tax exile . . . (*She flees upstairs with the fire-bucket and mop, laughing.*) Sh . . . ! What? Inland Revenue may hear us!

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the service quarters carrying a fresh plate of sardines.*

**Mrs Clackett** (*to herself*) What I did with that first lot of sardines I shall never know.

*She puts down the plate of sardines, and goes to sit on the sofa, on the parcel of sardines left there by Philip.*

**Flavia** (*urgently, looking down from the gallery, still holding the bucket and mop*) Mrs Newspaper!

**Mrs Clackett** *jumps up.*

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, you give me a turn! My heart jumped right out of the sofa!

**Flavia** So did mine! We thought you'd gone!

**Mrs Clackett** (*finding the parcel of sardines and examining it*) I thought you was in Sardinia!

**Flavia** We are! We are! You haven't seen us! We're not here!

**Mrs Clackett** I can guess which one of them put this here.

**Flavia** Yes, but the main thing is that the Income Tax are after us.

**Mrs Clackett** Lovely helping of sardines to sit on.

**Flavia** So if anybody asks for us, you don't know nothing. Anything. So I'll just . . . I'll just . . . get a hot-water bottle.

*She goes towards the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Mrs Clackett** And off she goes without waiting to find out about his letters.

**Flavia** (*stops, realises despairingly*) His letters?

*Enter Philip groggily from the bedroom.*

**Philip** Letters? What letters? You forward all the mail, don't you?

**Mrs Clackett** Not presents from Sardinia, dear.

**Philip** I'm so sorry.

*Exit Philip into the bedroom.*

**Mrs Clackett** I'll show you where I put presents from Sardinia.

*She goes upstairs towards Flavia, who is still outside the mezzanine bathroom, carrying the bucket and mop, not sure which way to move.*

I put presents from Sardinia in the pigeonhouse.

**Flavia** In the pigeonhouse?

**Mrs Clackett** In the little pigeonhouse down here, love.

*She stuffs the parcel of sardines down the front of Flavia's dress.*

**Flavia** looks down at the dress, then at the fire-bucket and mop she is carrying. **Mrs Clackett** retires hurriedly back downstairs and exits into the study, with Flavia after her.

*Enter Roger from the bedroom, still dressed, but with no tie on.*

**Roger** Yes, but I could hear voices!

*He falls over Philip's bag and box.*

*Enter Vicki from the bedroom in her underwear.*

**Vicki** Voices? What sort of voices?

**Roger** Box voices. I mean, *people's* boxes.

**Vicki** But there's no one here.

**Roger** Darling, I saw the door-handle move! And these bags . . . I'm not sure they were, you know, when we went into the, do you know what I mean?

**Vicki** I still don't see why you've got to put your tie on to look.

**Roger** (*picking up the bag and box*) Because if someone left these things outside the, I mean, come on, they obviously want them downstairs inside the, you know.

**Vicki** Mrs Clackett?

**Roger** It could be. Coming up here on her way to, well, carrying various, I mean, who knows?

**Vicki** (*looking over the banisters*) Oh look, she's opened our sardines.

*She moves to go downstairs. Roger puts down the bag and box outside the linen cupboard and grabs her.*

**Roger** Come back!

**Vicki** What?

**Roger** I'll fetch them! You can't go downstairs like that.

**Vicki** Why not?

**Roger** Mrs Crackett.

**Vicki** Mrs Crackett?

**Roger** One has certain obligations.

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the study, fishing sardines out of the front of her dress.*

**Mrs Clackett** (*to herself*) Sardines here. Sardines there. It's like the Battle of Waterloo out there.

**Roger** *tries to pull open the linen cupboard door to conceal Vicki, but it is obstructed by the bag and box.*

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, you're still poking around, are you?

**Roger** Yes, still poking, well, still pulling.

*He tugs at the door again, unaware of the obstruction, and the handle comes off as it opens.*

**Mrs Clackett** Good job I can't see far with this leg.

**Roger** *moves the bag and box, gets Vicki inside the linen cupboard and rebalances the handle in place.*

**Roger** Just, you know, trying all the doors and I mean checking all the door handles.

*He starts downstairs, carrying Philip's bag and box.*

Mrs Clackett.

**Mrs Clackett** Clackett, dear, Clackett.

**Roger** Mrs Clackett. Is there anyone else in the house, Mrs Clackett?

**Mrs Clackett** I haven't seen no one, dear.

**Roger** I thought I heard a box. I mean, I found these voices.

**Mrs Clackett** Voices? There's no voices here, love.

**Roger** I must have imagined it.

**Philip** *(off)* Oh, good Lord above!

*The colossal sound of Philip falling downstairs, off, taking half the platform with him, followed by a wailing groan.*

**Roger** I beg your pardon?

**Mrs Clackett** *(mimicking Philip)* Oh, good Lord above!

*She crashes things about on the sideboard in imitation of the off-stage crash and ends the performance with a wailing groan.*

**Roger** Why, what is it?

**Mrs Clackett** The study door's open.

*She crosses and closes the door.*

**Roger** They're going to want these inside the . . . (*He indicates the study.*) So I'll put them outside the . . . (*He indicates the front door.*) Then they can, do you know what I mean?

*Exit Roger through the front door, carrying the bag and box.*

*Enter Flavia from the mezzanine bathroom, carrying a first-aid box. She sees the linen cupboard door swinging open as she passes, and pushes it shut, so that the latch closes. The handle comes off in her hand.*

**Flavia** Nothing but flapping doors in this handle.

*Exit Flavia into the bedroom, holding the first-aid box and the handle. Enter from the study Philip, holding a tax demand and its envelope. The part is now being played not by Frederick but by Tim.*

**Philip/Tim** . . . final notice . . . steps will be taken . . . distraint . . . proceedings in court . . .

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, my Lord, who are you?

**Philip/Tim** I'm Philip.

**Mrs Clackett** You're Philip? What happened to you?

**Philip/Tim** Well, it's all got a bit slippery on the stairs out there.

**Mrs Clackett** You haven't done himself an injury?

**Philip/Tim** No. He's just a bit shaken. I'll be all right in a minute.

*Exit Mrs Clackett to the study.*

**Philip/Tim** You weren't going to tell me a gentleman had come about the house, were you?

**Mrs Clackett** (*off*) What?

**Philip/Tim** You weren't going to tell me a gentleman had come about the house?

*Enter Mrs Clackett from the study.*

**Mrs Clackett** That's right. A gentleman come about the house.

**Philip/Tim** Don't tell me. I'm not here.

**Mrs Clackett** Oh, and he's put your box out in the garden for you.

**Philip/Tim** Let them do anything. Just so long as you don't tell anyone we're here.

**Mrs Clackett** So I'll just sit down and turn on the . . . sardines, I've forgotten the sardines! *(She finds the second plate of sardines on the table, exactly where she put it.)* Oh, no, I haven't – I've remembered the sardines! What a surprise! I must go out to the kitchen and make another plate of sardines to celebrate.

*Exit Mrs Clackett to the service quarters.*

**Philip/Tim** I didn't get this! I'm not here. I'm in Spain. But if I didn't get it I didn't open it.

*Enter Flavia from the bedroom. She is holding the dress that Vicki arrived in and the handle of the linen cupboard.*

**Flavia** Darling . . . *(She stares at Philip/Tim in surprise, then recovers herself and looks at the dress.)* I never had a handle like this, did I?

**Philip/Tim** *(abstracted)* Didn't you?

**Flavia** I shouldn't buy anything as brassy as this.

**Flavia** *drops the dress and attempts to replace the handle on the linen cupboard behind her back.*

Oh, it's not something you gave me, is it?

**Philip/Tim** I should never have touched it.

**Flavia** No, it's lovely.

**Philip/Tim** Stick it down. Put it back. Never saw it.

*Exit Philip/Tim into study.*

**Flavia** Well, I'll put it in the attic, if anyone else wants to have a try.

*Exit Flavia along the upstairs corridor, taking the handle but leaving the*

*dress on the floor.*

*Enter **Roger** through the front door, without the bag and box.*

**Roger** All right, all right . . . Now the study door's open again!  
What's going on?

*He goes towards the study, and opens and closes the door. He reacts to the sound of urgent knocking overhead.*

Knocking.

*Knocking.*

Upstairs!

*He runs upstairs. Knocking.*

Oh my God, there's something in the . . . (*He discovers the lack of a handle.*) Oh my God! (*Knocking.*) Listen! I can't, because the handle has, you know. You'll just have to . . .

*He demonstrates pushing. Knocking.*

Come on! Come on!

*Knocking.*

I mean, whatever it is in there. Can you hear me? Darling!

*Knocking.*

Look, don't just keep banging! There's nothing I can, I mean it won't, there's nowhere to . . .

*Knocking. He opens the bedroom door.*

Listen! Climb round into the . . . (*He indicates the bedroom*) Squeeze through the, you know, and shin down the, I mean, there must be some way!

*Knocking.*

Oh, for pity's sake!

*Exit **Roger** into the bedroom.*

*Enter Philip from the study, holding a tax demand and an envelope. He is now being played by Frederick, with a plaster on his head.*

**Philip** ‘ . . . final notice . . . steps will be taken . . . distraint . . . proceedings in court . . . ’

*Enter Roger from the bedroom, pulling Vicki after him. Philip gazes at them, baffled.*

**Roger** Oh, it's you.

**Vicki** Of course it's me! You put me in here! In the dark with all black sheets and things.

**Roger** I put you in *there*, but you managed to squeeze through the, you know.

**Vicki** Why did *I* lock the door? Why did *you* lock the door!

**Roger** I couldn't, I mean, look, look, it's come off!

**Vicki** *Someone* locked the door!

**Philip** Sorry.

*Exit Philip apologetically into study.*

**Roger** Anyway, we can't stand here like this.

**Vicki** Like what?

**Roger** I mean, you know, with people going in and out.

**Vicki** OK, I'll take it off.

**Roger** In here, in here!

*He ushers her into the bedroom.*

*Enter Philip cautiously from the study, holding the tax demand and the envelope.*

**Philip** ‘ . . . final notice . . . steps will be taken . . . distraint . . . proceedings in court . . . ’

*Enter Roger from the bedroom, holding the first-aid box.*

*He looks up and down the landing.*

*Enter Vicki from the bedroom.*

**Philip** *stares at them.*

**Vicki** Now what?

**Roger** A hot-water box! *I didn't put it there!*

**Vicki** *I didn't put it there.*

**Philip** Sorry.

*Exit Philip into the study.*

**Roger** Someone in the bathroom, filling first-aid bottles.

*Exit Roger into the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Vicki** (*anxious*) You don't think there's something creepy going on?

*Exit Vicki into the mezzanine bathroom.*

*Enter Flavia along the upstairs corridor.*

**Flavia** Darling . . . Darling?

*Enter Philip cautiously from the study. He raises the income tax demand to speak.*

**Flavia** Darling, are you coming to bed or aren't you?

*Exit Flavia into the bedroom.*

**Philip** *raises his income tax demand to speak.*

*Enter Roger and Vicki from the mezzanine bathroom.*

**Roger** What did you say?

**Vicki** I didn't say anything.

*Exit Philip into the study.*

**Roger** I mean, first there's the door handle. Now there's the first

water box.

**Vicki** I can feel goose pimples all over.

**Roger** Yes, quick, get something round you.

**Vicki** Get the covers over our heads.

**Roger** *is about to open the bedroom door.*

**Roger** Just a moment. What did I do with those sardines?

*He goes downstairs. Vicki makes to follow.*

**Roger** You – wait here.

**Vicki** (*uneasily*) You hear all sorts of funny things about these old houses.

**Roger** Yes, but this one has been extensively modernised throughout. I can't see how anything creepy would survive oil-fired central heating and . . .

**Vicki** What? What is it?

**Roger** *looks round.*

**Vicki** What's happening?

**Roger** The sardines. They've gone. (*He double-takes on them.*) No, they haven't. They're here. Oh. Well. My God . . . I mean . . . my God!

*He turns and starts back upstairs.*

**Flavia** *crawls through the front door. She picks up the sardines and takes them back to the front door.*

**Roger** You put a plate of sardines down for two minutes, and the last thing you expect to find, I mean, these days, the one thing you don't expect to find when you come back is a plate of, I mean that's *really* weird!

**Vicki** Perhaps there is something funny going on. I'm going to get into bed and put my head under the . . .

*She freezes at the sight of the empty table outside the bedroom door.*

**Roger** Because, I mean, there they are! Exactly where I . . .

*He realises that the sardines are not there.*

**Vicki** Bag . . .

**Roger** goes back downstairs to investigate. **Vicki** runs after him.

**Flavia**, unseen by **Roger**, hesitates. She glances up towards the landing, reminded by the mention of the bag that she has failed to set it. She looks back at the table, realising that **Roger** now expects the sardines to be on the table.

**Roger** No, they're not. I suppose Mrs Sprockett must have, I mean, what is going on?

*He looks at Vicki. Flavia hurriedly replaces the sardines.*

**Vicki** Bag!

*Flavia exits hurriedly through the front door.*

**Roger** Bag?

**Vicki** Bag! Bag!

*She drags Roger back upstairs.*

**Roger** What do you mean, bag, bag?

**Roger** looks over the banisters and sees the sardines.

Sardines!

**Vicki** Bag! Bag! Bag!

**Roger** Sardines! Sardines!

**Vicki** Bag! Bag! Bag!

**Roger** Sardines! Sardines!

**Vicki** Bag! Bag! Bag!

*While Roger is gazing at the sardines, and Vicki is looking at Roger, the bedroom door opens and Flavia puts the flight bag on the table*

*outside.*

**Roger** (*tearing himself away from the sight of the sardines*) Bag?  
What bag?

**Vicki** (*gazing at the bag*) No bag!

**Roger** No bag?

**Vicki** Your bag! Suddenly! Here! Now – gone!

**Roger** It's in the bedroom. (*He sees the bag.*) It was in the bedroom. I put it in the bedroom. I'll put it back in the bedroom.

*As Roger goes to open the bedroom door it opens in front of him, and Flavia begins to come out, carrying the box.*

**Vicki** Don't go in there!

**Roger** *finds himself holding the box, with the door closing in his face.*

**Roger** The box!

**Vicki** The box?

**Roger** They've *both* not gone!

**Vicki** Oh! My files!

**Roger** What on earth is happening? Where's Mrs Spratchett?

*He starts downstairs with the bag and box. Vicki follows him.*

**Roger** You wait in the bedroom.

**Vicki** No! No! No!

*She runs downstairs.*

**Roger** At least put your dress on!

**Vicki** I'm not going in there!

**Roger** I'll fetch it for you, I'll fetch it for you!

*He puts the bag and box down at the head of the stairs, returns to the bedroom and sees the dress on the floor.*

*Exit **Roger** into the bedroom.*

**Vicki** Yes, quick – let's get out of here!

*Enter **Roger** from the bedroom.*

**Roger** Your dress has gone.

*As he speaks he slides the dress over the edge of the gallery with his foot to get rid of it. It falls on top of **Vicki** beneath and makes her jerk her head. She feels blindly around her; her lenses have gone again.*

**Vicki** I'm never going to see Basingstoke again!

**Roger** Don't panic! Don't panic! There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this.

*He starts downstairs, looking over the banisters, appalled at the sight of **Vicki** below, and falls headlong over the bag and box at the top of the stairs.*

***Vicki** searches blindly behind the sofa for her missing lenses.*

*Enter **Philip** from the study. He is holding the tax demand and the envelope.*

**Philip** . . . final notice . . . steps will be taken . . . distraint . . .

*His voice dies away at the sight of **Roger** lying at the bottom of the stairs.*

*Enter **Flavia** along the upstairs corridor, carrying various pieces of bric-a-brac.*

**Flavia** Darling, if we're not going to bed I'm going to clear out the attic . . .

**Philip** (to **Roger**) Oh dear. (He claps a handkerchief to his nose.)

**Flavia** Oh, great heavens!

*She rushes downstairs.*

*Enter **Mrs Clackett** from the service quarters, holding another plate of sardines.*

**Mrs Clackett** No other hands, thank you, not in my sardines . . .  
(*She sees Roger.*) . . . 'cause this time she has, she's gone and killed him!

**Flavia** He's stunned, that's all. Keep going.

**Roger** (*lifting his head*) Don't panic! Don't panic!

**Flavia** He's all right! Just keep going!

**Roger** There's some perfectly rational explanation for all this.

**Mrs Clackett** Where are we?

**Roger** I'll fetch Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening .  
. .

**Mrs Clackett** You've fetched her. I'm here.

**Roger** I've fetched Mrs Splotchett and she'll tell us what's happening.

**Mrs Clackett** She won't, you know.

**Flavia** *I'll* tell you what's happening.

**Roger** There's a man in there! Yes?

**Flavia** He's not in there, my precious – he's in here, look, and so am I.

**Mrs Clackett** No, no, there's no one in the house, love. Yes?

**Flavia** No, look, I know this is a great surprise for everyone. I mean, it's quite a shock for us, finding a man lying at the bottom of the stairs! (*To Philip.*) Isn't it, darling?

**Philip** Oh dear. (*He looks into his handkerchief.*) Oh dear, oh dear.  
(*He sits down hurriedly.*)

**Flavia** But now we've all met we'll just have to . . . Well, we'll just have to introduce ourselves! Won't we, darling?

**Philip** Introduce ourselves. (*He struggles to his feet, but has to sit down again.*) I'm so sorry.

**Flavia** This is my husband. I'm afraid surprises go straight to his nose!

**Vicki** *rises blindly from behind sofa at her cue.*

**Vicki** There's a man lurking in the undergrowth!

**Flavia** Oh, how delightful – another unexpected guest. (*To Vicki.*) So why don't you . . . why don't you . . . see what you can see in the garden?

*She pushes Vicki out of the front door, and helps Philip to his feet.*

(*to Philip*) And darling, you go off and get that bottle marked poison in the downstairs loo. That eats through anything.

**Philip** (*from behind his handkerchief*) Eats through anything. Right. Thank you. Thank you. Yes, I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, but this is ridiculous.

*He opens the downstairs bathroom door to go off. A pane of glass drops out of the mullioned window, and an arm comes through and releases the catch. The window opens, and through it appears the Burglar, played by Tim.*

**Burglar/Tim** No bars. No burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

*He climbs in and looks round in surprise to find the room full of people.*

**Mrs Clackett** Come in and join the party, love.

**Flavia** A burglar! This is most exciting!

**Philip** Oh dear, this is my fault. Because when I say, 'I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, this is ridiculous', and I open this door. . .

*He opens the downstairs bathroom again. Another pane of glass drops out of the mullioned window, and an arm comes through.*

*Enter through the window the Burglar, played by Selsdon.*

**Burglar/Selsdon** No bars. No burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

*He climbs in, becoming uneasily aware of the others as he does so.*

**Burglar/Tim** No, but sometimes it makes me want to sit down and weep.

**Mrs Clackett** I know, love, it's getting like a funeral in here.

**Burglar/Selsdon** When I think I used to do banks!

**Flavia** Just keep going.

**Burglar/Selsdon and Burglar/Tim (together)** When I remember I used to do bullion vaults! What am I doing now? I'm breaking into paper bags . . .

**Flavia** Keep going.

**Burglar/Selsdon** Stop?

**Flavia** No, no!

**Burglar/Selsdon** I thought the coast was clear, you see. I saw him going out to the bathroom.

**Flavia (closing the downstairs bathroom door)** Yes, never mind, it's all right. We'll think of something.

**Burglar/Selsdon** Oh, no, I was listening most carefully. What's it he says?

**Philip** 'I've heard of people getting stuck with a problem, but this is ridiculous.'

**Burglar/Selsdon** And he opened the door . . .

**Burglar/Selsdon** *opens the downstairs bathroom door to demonstrate.*

*A third pane of glass drops out of the mullioned window, and an arm comes through. Enter through the window the **Burglar**, played by **Lloyd**.*

**Burglar/Lloyd** No bars. No burglar alarms. They ought to be prosecuted for incitement.

*He climbs in, very uncertain what's happening to him. He doesn't know whether to react to the presence of the others or not.*

**Mrs Clackett** They always come in threes, don't they.

**All Three Burglars** When I think I used to do banks! When I remember I used to do bullion vaults . . .

**Flavia** Hold on! We know this man! He's not a burglar!

*She snatches Lloyd's Burglar hat off.*

He's our social worker!

**Roger** He's *what*?

**Flavia** He's that nice man who comes in and tells us *what to do*!

**Lloyd** (*appalled, faintly*) What to do?

**Others** (*firmly*) What to do!

*Lloyd is paralysed with stage-fright. He looks round helplessly and makes vague and ineffectual gestures.*

**Selsdon** What's he saying?

**Flavia** He's saying, he's saying – just get through it for doors and sardines! Yes? That's what it's all about! Doors and sardines! (*To Lloyd.*) Yes?

**Lloyd** (*helplessly*) Doors and sardines!

**Others** Doors and sardines!

*They all try to put this into practice. Philip picks up the sardines and runs around trying to find some application for them. The others open various doors, fetch further plates of sardines, and run helplessly around with them. Lloyd stands helplessly watching the chaos he has created swirl around him.*

**Flavia** He's saying, he's saying – 'Phones and police'!

**Lloyd** Phones and police . . .

**Philip** Phone!

**Philip and Roger** are each handed a half of the phone.

**Roger** Police!

**Roger** *puts the receiver to his ear. Philip dials.*

**Flavia** He's saying 'Bags and boxes'.

**Others** Bags and boxes!

*Everyone runs around with the two boxes and the two bags, all helplessly colliding with each other and running into the furniture.*

**Flavia** (*decisively*) Sheets, sheets! He's saying 'Sheets'!

**Lloyd** Sheets . . .

**Others** (*desperately*) Sheets!

**Roger** *runs out of the study door, Tim out of the front door.*

**Flavia** He's saying 'All we want now is a nice happy ending!'

**Roger** *comes back at once propelling the helpless Vicki, wrapping her in the white sheet as they go. Tim comes back simultaneously with Poppy, cramming her into the real Sheikh's robes.*

**Dotty** (*looking at Poppy*) And here she is! In her wedding dress!

**Flavia** (*looking at Vicki*) Yes, yes – it's their wedding day!

**Mrs Clackett** (*still looking at Poppy*) It's their wedding day!

**Others** Ah!

**Flavia** What a happy ending!

**Mrs Clackett** *pushes Poppy to Lloyd's side. Flavia pushes Vicki to his other side.*

**Mrs Clackett** Do you take this sheet to be your lawful wedded wife? If not, speak now, or forever hold your peace.

**Lloyd** *nods helplessly.*

**Selsdon** What's he saying, what's he saying?

**Flavia** He's saying . . . he's saying . . . 'Last line!'

**Selsdon** Last line? Me?

**All** Last line, last line!

**Selsdon** When all around is strife and uncertainty, there's nothing like a good old-fashioned plate of . . .

*He dries.*

**All** (*holding up plates of sardines; beseechingly*) Curtain!

*Tableau. Then Tim runs hurriedly off.*

**CURTAIN**

*Except that it jams just above the level of their heads. As one man they seize hold of it and drag it down. A ripping sound. The curtain detaches itself from its fixings and falls on top of them all, leaving a floundering mass of bodies on stage.*

# Nothing On

Extracts from the programme

# Grand Theatre

WESTON-SUPER-MARE

Proprietors: GRAND THEATRE (Weston-super-Mare) LIMITED General  
Manager: E.E.A. GRADSHAW

The Grand Theatre Weston-super-Mare is a Member of the Grand Group.

Evenings at 7.45

Matinee: Wednesday at 2.30

Saturday at 5.00

and 8.30

Commencing Tuesday 15th January for One Week Only

Otstar Productions Ltd present

**DOTTY OTLEY**

**BELINDA BLAIR**

**GARRY LEJEUNE**

in

**NOTHING ON**

by

**ROBIN HOUSEMONGER**

with

**SELSDON MOWBRAY**

**BROOKE ASHTON**

**FREDERICK FELLOWES**

Directed by **LLOYD DALLAS**

Designed by **GINA BOXHALL**

Lighting by **ROD WRAY**

Costumes by **PATSY HEMMING**

**WORLD PREMIERE PRIOR TO NATIONAL TOUR!**

**SMOKING IS NOT PERMITTED IN THE AUDITORIUM**

The use of cameras and tape recorders is forbidden.

The management reserve the right to refuse admission, also to make any alteration in the cast which may be rendered necessary by illness or other unavoidable causes.

From the theatre rules 'All exits shall be available for use during all

performances’.

‘The fire curtain shall be lowered during each performance’.

## NOTHING ON

by ROBIN HOUSEMONGER

Cast in order of appearance:

<b>Mrs Clackett</b>	DOTTY OTLEY
<b>Roger Tramplemain</b>	GARRY LEJEUNE
<b>Vicki</b>	BROOKE ASHTON
<b>Philip Brent</b>	FREDERICK FELLOWES
<b>Flavia Brent</b>	BELINDA BLAIR
<b>Burglar</b>	SELSDON MOWBRAY
<b>Sheikh</b>	FREDERICK FELLOWES

The action takes place in the living-room of the Brents' country home, on a Wednesday afternoon.

for OTSTAR PRODUCTIONS LTD

*Company and Stage Manager* TIM ALLGOOD

*Assistant Stage Manager* POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR

Production credits

Sardines by Old Salt Sardines. Antique silverware and cardboard boxes by Mrs J.G.H. Norton-Taylor. Stethoscope and hospital trolley by Severn Surgical Supplies. Straitjacket by Kumfy Restraints Ltd. Coffins by G. Ashforth and Sons.

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of EUROPEAN BREWERIES in sponsoring this production.

## Behind The Dressing Room Doors

**DOTTY OTLEY** (Mrs Clackett) makes a welcome return to the stage to create the role of Mrs Clackett after playing Mrs Hackett, Britain's most famous lollipop lady ('Ooh, I can't 'ardly 'old me lolly up!') in over 320 episodes of TV's ON THE ZEBRAS. Her many stage appearances include her critically acclaimed portrayal of Fru Säckett, the comic char in Strindberg's SCENES FROM THE CHARNELHOUSE. Her first appearance ever? In a school production of HENRY IV PART I – as the old bag-lady, Mrs Duckett.

**BELINDA BLAIR** (Flavia Brent) has been on the stage since the age of four, when she made her debut in SINBAD THE SAILOR as one of Miss Toni Tanner's Ten Tapping Tots. She subsequently danced her way round this country, Southern Africa, and the Far East in shows like ZIPPEDY-DOODA! and HERE COME LES GIRLS! More recently she has been seen in such comedy hits as DON'T MR DUDDLE!, WHO'S BEEN SLEEPING IN MY BED?, and TWICE TWO IS SEX. She is married to scriptwriter Terry Wough, who has contributed lead-in material to most of TV's chat shows. They have two sons and three retrievers.

**GARRY LEJEUNE** (Roger Tramplemain) while still at drama school won the coveted Laetitia Daintyman Medal for Violence. His television work includes POLICE!, CRIME SQUAD, SWAT, FORENSIC, and THE NICK, but he is probably best-known as 'Cornetto', the ice-cream salesman who stirs the hearts of all the lollipop ladies in ON THE ZEBRAS.

**SELSDON MOWBRAY** (Burglar) first 'trod the boards' at the age of 12 – playing Lucius in a touring production of JULIUS CAESAR, with his father, the great Chelmsford Mowbray, in the lead. Since then he has served in various local reps, and claims to have appeared with every company to have toured Shakespeare in the past half-century, working his way up through the Mustardseeds and the various Boys and Sons of, to the Balthazars, Benvolios, and Le Beaus; then the Slenders, Lennoxes, Trinculos, Snouts, and Froths; and graduating to the Scroops, Poloniuses, and Aguecheeks. His most recent film appearance was as Outraged Pensioner in GREEN WILLIES.

**BROOKE ASHTON** (Vicki) is probably best known as the girl

wearing nothing but 'good, honest, natural froth' in the Hauptbahnhofbrau lager commercial. Her television appearances range from Girl at Infants' School in ON THE ZEBRAS to Girl in Massage Parlour in ON PROBATION. Cinemagoers saw her in THE GIRL IN ROOM 14, where she played the Girl in Room 312.

**FREDERICK FELLOWES** (Philip Brent) has appeared in many popular television series, including CALLING CASUALTY, CARDIAC ARREST!, OUT-PATIENTS, and IN-PATIENTS. On stage he was most recently seen in the controversial all-male version of THE TROJAN WOMEN. He is happily married, and lives near Crawley, where his wife breeds pedigree dogs. 'If she ever leaves me,' he says, 'it will probably be for an Irish wolfhound!'

**ROBIN HOUSEMONGER** (Author) was born in Worcester Park, Surrey, into a family 'unremarkable in every way except for an aunt with red hair who used to sing all the high twiddly bits from THE MERRY WIDOW over the tea-table'. He claims to have been the world's most unsuccessful gents hosiery wholesaler, and began writing 'to fill the long hours between one hosiery order and the next'. He turned this experience into his very first play, SOCKS BEFORE MARRIAGE, which ran in the West End for nine years. Two of his subsequent plays, BRIEFS ENCOUNTER and HANKY PANKY, broke box office records in Perth, Western Australia. NOTHING ON is his seventeenth play.

**LLOYD DALLAS** (Director) 'read English at Cambridge, and stagecraft at the local benefits office'. He has directed plays in most parts of Britain, winning the South of Scotland Critics' Circle Special Award. In recent years he has probably become best known for his brilliant series of 'Shakespeare in Summer' productions in the parks of the inner London boroughs.

## A Glimpse of the Noumenal

(condensed from J G Stillwater, *Eros Untrousered – Studies in the Semantics of Bedroom Farce*)

The cultural importance of the so-called 'bedroom farce', or 'English sex farce', has long been recognised, but attention has tended to centre on the metaphysical significance of mistaken identity and upon the social criticism implicit in the form's ground-breaking exploration of cross-dressing and trans-gender role-playing. The focus of scholarly interest, however, is now beginning to shift to the recurrence of certain mythic themes in the genre, and to their religious and spiritual implications.

In a typical bedroom farce, a man and a woman come to some secret or mysterious place (cf. *Beauty and the Beast*, *Bluebeard's Castle*, etc.) to perform certain acts which are supposed to remain concealed from the eyes of the world. This is plainly a variant of the traditional 'search' or 'quest', the goal of which, though presented as being 'sexual' in nature, is to be understood as a metaphor of enlightenment and transcendence. Some partial disrobing may occur, to suggest perhaps a preliminary stripping away of worldly illusions, but total nudity (perfect truth) and complete 'carnal knowledge' (i.e. spiritual understanding) are perpetually forestalled by the intervention of coincidental encounters (often with other seekers engaged in parallel 'quests'), which bear a striking resemblance to the trials undergone by postulants in various esoteric cults (cf. *The Magic Flute*, *Star Wars*, etc.).

A recurring and highly significant feature of the genre is a multiplicity of doors. If we regard the world on this side of the doors as the physical one in which mortal men are condemned to live, then the world or worlds concealed behind them may be thought of as representing both the higher and more spiritual plane into which the postulants hope to escape, and the underworld from which at any moment demons may leap out to tempt or punish. When the doors do open, it is often with great suddenness and unexpectedness, highly suggestive of those epiphanic moments of insight and enlightenment which give access to the 'other', and offer us a fleeting glimpse of the noumenal.

Another recurring feature is the fall or loss of trousers. This can be readily recognised as an allusion to the Fall of Man and the loss of primal innocence. The removal of the trousers traditionally

reveals a pair of striped underpants, in which we recognise both the stripes of the tiger, the feral beast that lurks in all of us beneath the civilised exterior suggested by the lost trousers, and perhaps also a premonitory representation of the stripes caused by the whipping which was formerly the traditional punishment for fornication.

Farce, interestingly, is popularly categorised as 'funny'. It is true that the form often involves 'funny' elements in the sense of the strange or uncanny, such as supposedly supernatural phenomena, and behaviour suggestive of demonic possession. But the meaning of 'funny' here is probably also intended to include its secondary sense, 'provocative of laughter.'

This is an interesting perception. It scarcely needs to be said that laughter, involving as it does the loss of self-control and the spasmodic release of breath, a vital bodily fluid, is a metaphorical representation of the sexual act. But it can also occasion the shedding of tears, which suggests that it may in addition be a sublimated form of mourning. Indeed we recognise here a symbolic foretaste of death. If sneezing has been widely feared because it is thought that during a sneeze the soul flies out of the body, and may not be recaptured (whence 'Bless you!' or '*Gesundheit!*'), then how much more dangerous is laughter. Not once but over and over again the repeated muscular contractions and expulsions of breath drive the 'soul' forth from the body. The danger of laughter is recognised in such expressions as 'killingly funny,' and 'I almost died'. There is a lurking fear that even more spectacular violence may ensue, and that a farce may end with a bloodletting as gruesome as in *Oedipus* or *Medea*, if people are induced to 'split their sides' or 'laugh their heads off'.

Fear of the darker undertones of bedroom farce has sometimes in the past led to its dismissal as 'mere entertainment'. As the foregoing hopefully makes clear, though, financial support by the Arts Council or a private sponsor for the tour of a bedroom farce would be by no means out of place.

**Bloomsbury Methuen Drama**  
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Imprint previously known as Methuen Drama

[www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)

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First published in 1982 by Methuen London Ltd

This electronic edition published in 2016

This revised edition, for the Old Vic Theatre production, was published in the United Kingdom in 2011 by Methuen Drama Reprinted in 2001, incorporating text revisions made for the Piccadilly Theatre's production, and in 2011 incorporating revisions made for the Old Vic's production.

Reprinted by Bloomsbury Methuen Drama 2012 (twice), 2013, 2014, 2015

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**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: PB: 978-0-4137-5850-7

ePDF: 978-1-3500-1334-6

ePub: 978-1-3500-1335-3

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Series: Modern Plays